JOINING THE CONVERSATION: TOWARD A SYNTHETIC APPROACH TO

MEDIA FORMATION AMONG CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOL STUDENTS

A THESIS-PROJECT

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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To the children and youth of Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church.

CONTENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACNA: Anglican Church in North America.

CTR: Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church, located in Danvers, Massachusetts, where I

serve as Assistant Rector and Director of Youth and Children's Ministries.

HBE: Home-based Education, often called "Homeschooling." This term is recognizes the

home as the center from which education decisions are made, but leaves open the

possibility that a significant amount of that education may not actually take place at

home.

ABSTRACT

My local ministry context is a theologically conservative Anglican congregation, in which a substantial proportion of youth and children are or have been enrolled in home-based education. I designed and ran a pilot workshop for high-school students in home-based education, with a goal of offering training in boundaries, skills, and habits that allow for positive interaction with popular electronic media. A study of the biblical motif of sojourners and exiles provides a theological framework against which different models of Church and Culture are compared. It is found that Christians, as sojourners and exiles, embrace an alternative identity as the People of God, yet function as *bona fide* participants in their broader cultures, through which the *missio dei* is advanced. A robust eschatology prepares the Christian to navigate the inherent tensions and difficulties. A study of many efforts at formation around media identify three strategic categories into which these efforts fit, namely cultural abstinence, cultural conversation, and faith-formative practices performed within the Christian community. An eight-week media workshop was designed as a synthesis of these different practices, with focus on a Media Rule of Life, five skills of cultural conversation, and five corresponding spiritual practices. From the results of this pilot course, recommendations are made for development of future media formation approaches.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM IN ITS CONTEXT: THE FORMATIONAL CHALLENGE PRE-
SENTED BY POPULAR ELECTRONIC MEDIA

The Local Ministry Context

I serve as Director of Youth and Children's Ministries at Christ the Redeemer An-

glican Church (CTR) in Danvers, Massachusetts. CTR is a parish in the Anglican Church

in North America (ACNA), a theologically conservative Anglican province constituted in

2009. Though the underlying issues behind the global crisis in Anglican Christianity that

resulted in the formation of the ACNA are far outside the realm of this study, they are rel-

evant in that they set the tone for the local ministry context. Because the presenting issues

that triggered this crisis centered around human sexuality, the ACNA has publicly, uni-

versally, and unambiguously stood in opposition to same sex marriage and abortion. Giv-

en the seismic shift in public opinion on homosexual practice and same-sex marriage in

recent years, both in American churches and in the broader cultural context, this amounts

to a commitment to a position that is increasingly out of the mainstream of cultural

thought. Because both CTR and ACNA were birthed in the context of this particular con-

flict, this commitment to stand in the mainstream of historic Christianity and outside that

of the broader culture is highly formative to the manner in which members self-identify,

both corporately and personally.

This self-positioning outside of the cultural mainstream is highly evident in the

educational decisions being made by CTR's families. Of the 17 students involved in the

senior high youth ministry at CTR during the 2016-2017 school year, only 5 were en-

rolled in public school, and two of those students were in their first year of public school, having been in home-based education (HBE)[1] in previous years. 11 students were currently in HBE, while 1 was enrolled in a specifically Christian private school context. Thus, only 18 percent of these students had been consistently enrolled in the public educational system, while 82 percent were educated primarily or exclusively in a separate, self-consciously Christian context. Because peer relationships are often formed at school, those students in HBE have limited peer relationships outside of the context of local church and Christian homeschooling networks.

Additionally, my experience with these students has shown a tendency, among parents and youth, to adopt a posture toward the broader American culture, and popular media in general, that is primarily defensive. "The culture" is viewed as running broadly counter to Christian values or perspectives, and as something to be resisted. Inherent in this attitude is the unspoken assumption that one stands in some sense outside of the culture. Many of these youth gravitate (whether of their own volition of at the prompting of their parents) toward music and film published and marketed specifically as Christian, produced by Christians, and/or broadly approved by the Christian community.

In early 2015, I hosted a series of movie nights with senior high youth at CTR, intentionally exposing them, most of the time, to films that came from the cultural mainstream, and hosting a follow-up discussion. The tone of conversations was critical. Those

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[1] I consistently use "home-based education" to refer to what is often called "homeschooling." Whereas "homeschooling" implies that education is taking place at home, "home-based education" implies that the primary educational choices for a student are taking place at home; this home-based approach could take advantage of many educational opportunities, both for core curriculum and enrichment, offered outside of that home context.

in leadership observed that, while these youth were clearly practicing skills of discernment, judging whether cultural content was or was not consistent with a Christian perspective, other skills and habits were underdeveloped, particularly those that involve accurately and charitably understanding the perspectives being presented by, and of finding common ground with, those outside of the Christian community.

These Christian high school students in HBE are experiencing cultural distance from other their own peers that is expressed and reenforced by several factors, including but not limited to: (1) lack of peer relationships outside of the Christian community; (2) lack of exposure to public educational curricula; (3) lack of exposure to popular media outside of Christian-approved sources; (4) habituated defensive approach to the broader culture; (5) lack of skill in positive engagement with popular electronic media. This study is focused only toward addressing factors 3-5 on this list.

General Project Parameters

This project lays out the rationale and design for a workshop designed for high school students in HBE. Because HBE can result in ambiguity involving grade levels, the workshop was offered to students ages 14-18, a range largely inclusive of high-school age students. It was also opened up to include interested high school students in their first year of public education, who had been in a distinctly Christian educational context in previous years, as the great bulk of their formation took place the same context. The goal of this workshop is to aid students in building the skills and habits necessary for positive interaction with popular electronic media. In this case, positive interaction is defined both

as media exposure that results in a net increase in one's commitment to the tenets, out-look, and way of life distinctive to the Christian faith, and as one's ability to discern the cultural principles and imaginative framework being presented by this media and to evaluate and respond to this content appropriately. "Popular electronic media" is, in this study, restricted to television, film, music, advertisements, and online content created for mass consumption. Social media use is outside the scope of this study, although the current interconnectivity of electronic content means that it is not fully absent from the discussion, and that any insights found here may be relevant to use of social media.

Framework of Study

Chapter 2 will set up a theological framework that forms the perspective and priorities of this study. Because CTR parishioners are experiencing a sense of distance from their own culture, I focus on the biblical motif of the sojourner and exile, drawing out common themes across the canon of Scripture. In each case, the sojourner lives out an alternative identity and lifestyle within a broader culture, while continuing to participate significantly as a *bona fide* member of that culture. The advancing of the *missio dei* occurs as the sojourner faithfully lives in the inherent tension that this situation brings. Additionally, a robust eschatology is always a motivating aspect of the sojourner's experience; faith in a promise of God that the tensions of the present moment will give way to something greater and more enduring strengthens the sojourner to persevere.

Chapter 3 provides a review and analysis of relevant literature. The first section reviews Christian cultural theorists who seek to clarify the relationship that Christians

personally, and the Church corporately, have with the broader cultures within which we live. These theorists are evaluated in light of the central elements of the sojourner motif in Scripture. The second section looks specifically at literature around popular electronic media. Some of this literature speaks of the formative power of these media, while some is focused on the proper means of directing the influence that the media are having on Christian formation. This literature is arranged into three larger strategic categories of cultural abstinence, cultural conversation, and faith-formative practices. Ultimately, I suggest a synthetic approach that fits into all three categories.

Chapter 4 lays out the design of the actual workshop, and the evaluative procedures set up. It also outlines the differences between the workshop as originally conceived, and that which was finally offered. An initial attempt was made to offer a more robust 12-week course in Fall of 2017; it was modified into an 8-week workshop format during an attempt to offer this course through New Hope Tutorials, a local organization that hosts a range of courses and workshops for students in HBE. When New Hope declined to host the workshop, the adjustments made in this conversation carried into the actual workshop, which was hosted in the home of a HBE family, advertised largely through that family's personal contacts, and scheduled at at time of that family's choosing. Only then was it possible to gather 12 participants, and then only for the reduced-scope workshop.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of data collected during the workshop, as well as some anecdotal observations from the workshop. It discusses the analytical limitations created by a high level of non-response. While there was not a clear growth curve in the

manifestation of the targeted skills, there was clear evidence of consistent engagement with the two skills more oriented toward positive interaction with cultural content, contributing toward formation of new habits. Also, I found that the brevity of the workshop, the lack of previous relationships between many participants, limited personal commitment to this formation on the part of the participants, and differences in piety prevented the synthetic approach originally conceived from being fully experienced. Therefore, I make recommendations for a context in which a synthetic approach may be more successfully tested.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SOJOURNER MOTIF THROUGH THE CANON OF
SCRIPTURE

Introduction to the Sojourner/Exile Motif

In recent decades, discussion of Christian cultural engagement has been shaped by

H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. Niebuhr seeks to simplify two thousand years

of Christian cultural engagement through the use of five primary "types."[1] Niebuhr him-

self acknowledges that these types are oversimplifications, and that the actual position of

any one historical character, even of those being cited as primary examples of that type,

can have characteristics pertaining to multiple types at the same time. While this work

may be helpful in identifying different impulses that have driven Christian cultural en-

gagement, the ensuing conversation has often fallen prey to the danger of stereotyping

individuals, movements, even ourselves, into one particular type.

Certainly, for example, those who choose to educate their children outside of the

mainstream of public education can fall prey to this sort of stereotyping. It is easy to un-

derstand why such parents can be classified as representing the "Christ Against Culture"

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[1] The types include "Christ Against Culture," emphasizing "the opposition between Christ and culture", "The Christ of Culture," recognizing "a fundamental agreement between Christ and culture,", "Christ Above Culture," representing a synthesis between Christ and culture, "Christ and Culture in Paradox," emphasizing "the polarity and tension of Christ and culture," and "Christ Transforming Culture," in which "Christ is seen as the converter of man in his culture and society." These are further summarized in H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 40-44.

type, particularly given the rhetoric of some homeschoolers against the public school system and the worldview formed in it.[2]

D.A. Carson recognizes the danger of this approach. "We should not think of each pattern in Niebuhr's fivefold scheme as warranted by individual documents in the New Testament, such that we have the option to pick and choose which pattern we prefer, assured that all are equally encompassed by the canon that warrants them individually. Rather, we should be attempting a holistic grasp of the relations between Christ and culture, fully aware, as we make our attempt, that peculiar circumstances may call us to emphasize some elements in one situation, and other elements in another situation."[3]

John Howard Yoder points out that Niebuhr's "types" fail as types, because not even the individuals named as preeminent examples of these types truly fit them. Rather, he encourages use of the language of "motif", observing that Niebuhr himself progresses linguistically in this direction.[4] In using this language, we recognize that various themes can co-exist, even if the cultural moment causes specific themes to receive more attention in any given time, place, and personality.

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[2] As an example of this rhetoric, see Ray E. Ballman. *The How & Why of Home Schooling.* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 32-33. "Every year thousands of young, impressionable children are being sacrificed to the beast of institutional arrogance and insensitivity. The powerful public educational system feeds this beast daily with a growing diet of immoral, violence-prone, anti-family, evolutionary textbooks coupled with a side dish of behavior modification and value clarification techniques. Add to this a daily seasoning of world peer pressure, and what do you have? A confused child with a mounting problem of self-respect."

[3] D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 43.

[4] John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture." In Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, John Howard Yoder. *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 45.

Our concern over imbalanced attitudes to cultural engagement in the HBE move-ment need not be expressed in a call to reject the "against culture" elements inherent in its approach. Rather, we can urge more consistent application of various Biblical motifs, cor-recting misapplication of motifs or application of unbiblical motifs, and giving renewed attention to motifs have been neglected.

One important biblical motif for culture engagement is that of the sojourner or exile. It is ubiquitous throughout the canon of Scripture, becomes a strong focal point during the exile, and is given a spiritual[5] application in the writings of the New Testa-ment.

While this motif is always relevant for Christians, particularly in its spiritual ap-plications, it is likely to be given more emphasis in shaping one's relationship to culture in contexts where Christianity has not had great public influence, or where its public in-fluence is perceived to be waning. The sojourner or exile is a faithful outsider, living away from one's true home and people, carrying out the *missio dei* from a position of vulnerability and weakness.

Recurrent Elements of the Sojourner/Exile Motif

In order to prepare our children, youth, and families to embrace more fully their identity as sojourners in the world, it is necessary to highlight certain recurring elements of this motif. Three particular elements are worth identifying. First, the sojourner has an

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[5] Here and elsewhere, "spiritual" does not imply that the reality is merely metaphorical, or even necessarily something unobservable. Rather, it refers to a type of deep reality that can we recog-nize only through revelation; it is a truth taught to us by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:13).

alternative identity, distinguishing himself or herself from others within the broader culture in several important ways; clear eschatological hope encourages the sojourner to maintain this distinction even when it causes mistreatment and discomfort. However, the sojourner also experiences true *cultural engagement*; his distinct lifestyle is experienced amidst, not in separation from, the world. Finally, the sojourner's interactions with the broader culture are the context for *mission to the world*, calling the Gentiles to give glory to God the Father. All three of these elements must be in place for anybody claiming to be faithful to the biblical motif of sojourner.

Highlighted Biblical Examples of Recurrent Elements

Abraham

Abraham's call to leave his kindred and his father's house put him in the position of an outsider in the land of promise. Even after decades in the land, this is poignantly demonstrated as he negotiates for property in which to bury his wife: "I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place" (Gen 23:5). This lack of assimilation is shown to be deliberate in the next chapter, in which he insists that his son neither depart from the land of promise (thus ending his sojourner status by returning home), nor marry a Canaanite (24:3, 6). As the Canaanites themselves later attest (34:21-23), intermarriage would effectively cause them to become "one people," sharing lands and possessions. Abraham and his family lived as sojourners because they identified themselves as distinct from their neighbors, due to the specific covenant

promises made uniquely to them as a family (12:2, 15:5, 17:7-8). With the introduction of

the covenant of circumcision, this distinctiveness was shown forth visibly and liturgically.

While identifying as distinct from the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, Abraham

clearly participated in the culture of that land. In order to rescue Lot, he participates in

local warfare (Gen 14). In the before-mentioned scene, in which he identifies himself as a

sojourner, the Hittites identify him as "a prince of God among us" (23:6), leaving the

strong impression that Abraham the sojourner is also a real political player among them,

as well as one well-versed in practices of negotiation. It is worth noting that in each of

these instances, Abram's engagement with Canaanite culture is tempered by his embrace

of an alternative identity. In each, he expressly refuses to receive a gift from his neigh-

bors; in doing so, he avoids being drawn into a patron-client relationship that could ulti-

mately result in an erosion of his distinctive status.[6]

While Abraham's actions do not seem "missional" as the term is often used, they

were directly tied in with the *missio dei*. God's work of redemption would happen

through this covenant family that was being established. The greater work of redemption

was only present as a promise at this point, but the missional significance was not lost to

Abraham: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (12:3).

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[6] See Philip F. Esler, ed., *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2006), 100. "This is not about Abraham's generosity, but about his refusal to enter into a patron-client relationship to the king…Genesis 14…presents Abraham as equal in rank and honor to worldly kings. His honor and prestige are at stake; he therefore must not be beholden to others, certainly not a petty Canaanite king." The point is also made that Abraham did indeed receive gifts in other contexts, from Pharaoh and Abimelech. Perhaps the difference is that the nature of those gifts, reparation, creates a different context in which Abraham is not similarly beholden to the giver.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Prophesying in the days leading up to the exile and immediately following, the preaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel includes a classic prophetic call for Israel to embrace the covenant, with all of the distinctiveness that it brings. Before their deportation, distinctiveness does not come within the motif of sojourning, because Israel is settled in its own land. Yet, the call to an alternative identity is clear in words like, "Learn not the ways of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, for the customs of the peoples are vanity" (Jer 10:2). The prophets emphasize the aptness of judgement— Israel has failed to embrace its uniqueness, being conformed to the worship and ways of its pagan neighbors. Now that very uniqueness is threatened by exile, as emphasized in the statement, "Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them" (Ezek 4:13). If Israel failed to embrace a distinctive identity while living among their own countrymen in a sovereign Israel, a complete loss of distinctiveness seems inevitable once they are carried away into foreign lands.

Yet, despite the threat to Israel's alternate identity among the nations, the prophets declare, "If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever" (Jer 31:36). The prophetic hope is that Israel's unique identity would not be wiped out by exile; the LORD would regather the exiles to their homeland. "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place" (Jer 29:9).

One might expect that, in light of this hope, the prophetic call would be to resist any accommodation to Babylonian life, to disengage and keep one's bags packed. Yet it is the false prophets, those declaring an imminent return "within two years" (28:3) who would encourage such an approach.[7] Jeremiah, proclaiming a lengthy exile, urges the opposite: "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:4-7). The prophets do not offer their people a ghettoed lifestyle; they offer hope. Israel's distinctiveness will not be furthered by undermining the society and authority structure present in Babylon, but by a persistent and subversive hope that the Babylonian assimilation machine is unable to wipe out God's covenant promises to Israel.

So these exilic prophets leave their people immersed in Babylonian life, willing participants in the communities in which they find themselves, yet marked by hope that their days of exile will come to an end. It is impossible to be fully assimilated, shedding one's alternative identity, while simultaneously embracing such a promise.

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[7] The preface to the essay series "Thriving in Babylon" points out that Jeremiah's was a minority position, describing those in conflict with Jeremiah as shouting, "Do *not* settle down! Do *not* pray for Babylon! Do *not* work for that culture's peace and welfare! To the contrary: Live with contempt for Babylon and the surrounding culture, and expect soon-coming 'deliverance' (a rapture from responsibility, as it were…Stand on the sidelines and make 'prophetic' denunciations while building your own little isolated, counter-cultural communities!" See David B. Capes, Daryl J. Charles, eds., *Thriving in Babylon: Essays in Honor of A.J. Conyers* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), xvi.

Ezekiel strongly connects the return of Israel's exiles with the *missio dei*, arguing that this promised restoration against all odds will bring revelation to the nations, with multiple repetitions of phrases like "Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezek 36:36).

These prophetic themes of alternative identity, cultural engagement, and mission to the nations are lived out concretely in the narrative portions of the book of Daniel.

Daniel

Daniel and his companions were subject to a very deliberate Babylonian strategy of assimilation. In an apparent attempt to incorporate the upper-crust of Jewish society into Babylon, selection was made from the royalty and nobility of "youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace" (Dan 1:4). Through three years of schooling in the language and learning of the Babylonians, these youth would eat from the king's table (1:4-5). In addition, they were assigned new names. This was not an incidental detail; each of their Hebrew names made reference to Israel's God, while these new names referenced Babylonian gods (1:7). Daniel and his friends are left with very few cultural markers pointing to their identity among the covenant people; they are outside of the holy land, surrounded by foreign companions, assigned foreign food not in keeping with Jewish law, trained in Babylonian philosophy, speaking the language of the Babylonians, and named after Babylonian deities. These opening verses leave one with

the distinct impression that these young men will be absorbed wholesale into Babylonian society.

We may be curious how many Jewish youths simply went along with the Babylonian program of assimilation. Yet the Daniel narratives chronicle a dual approach, in which he does participate in Babylonian life, yet resists assimilation particularly in relation to the requirements of the Torah. He clearly does not resist assimilation wholesale; he submits to the program of study and, at least to some extent, to the renaming. Yet he resists in regard to the food requirements; his desire not to defile himself could be connected with distinctions between clean and unclean foods, but is probably primarily connected with idol worship; given that Daniel is also concerned about the king's wine (1:8). It is difficult to see how wine could run afoul of the law unless it had been offered in sacrifice to another God. It should be noted that this refusal was done with gentleness and respect; it came in the form of a request, one which could not have been obtained apart from the grace of God (stated in 1:9, and strongly implied in 1:15).

This one act of non-conformity was likely of great social consequence for Daniel and his companions; they apparently participated fully in studies alongside other Babylonian students, but their alternative identity as God's covenant people was reinforced to them and their colleagues at every meal.

God's aid was not only given to Daniel and his friends in their acts of resistance; their academic excellence is also attributed to his gift (1:17); God shows his blessing both on their non-conformity and on their active engagement in Babylonian culture.

Daniel and his companions form a small community; they are unified in their resistance and in their engagement. While it is not stated directly, it seems likely that this community functioned as a base of support, where central convictions could be reinforced and where the struggles of being a faithful sojourner in this context were processed together. Having been included among the wise men of Babylon, Daniel carries his distinctive Jewish perspective into an urgent matter of state, seeking the supportive intercession of his friends. In response to Nebuchadnezzar's demand for his dream and its interpretation to be told, the wise men together declare their inability, stating, "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. No one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh" (1:10-11). After prayerfully seeking and finding this knowledge by divine revelation, Daniel is able to stand before the king, echoing the logic of his associates, but giving a profoundly different conclusion based on his faith in the one God: "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the later days" (1:27-28). Daniel carries his distinctive faith into his public work, saving the lives of many of his companions.

The result of this approach to cultural engagement is the revelation of God's glory among the Gentiles; Nebuchadnezzar makes a true confession regarding the God of Israel (2:47). Similar acknowledgements are repeated throughout Daniel.[8]

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[8] See Dan 4:2-3, 34-35, 6:20, 26-27.

The stories of the fiery furnace and the lions' den are popularly and rightly upheld as stories of resistance to assimilation, particularly of refusal to participate in pagan worship and of persistence in the worship of the true God. However, we must also realize that these accounts exist only because Daniel and his companions were not rabble-rousers, but were full participants in Babylonian society. Nebuchadnezzar's anger was so great, at least in part, because those refusing to bow down to his image were trusted servants whom he had "appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon" (3:12). These were not just ordinary citizens refusing to buy into the king's megalomania; they were highly visible, respected statesmen. Their passive refusal could not go unnoticed.[9] Likewise, in the case of Darius, the king's distress (6:14) was due to his high regard for Daniel, who had become his most trusted administrator. Daniel emphasizes his faithfulness to Darius even after his deliverance: "O king, live forever …I was found blameless before him, and also before you, O king, I have done no harm" (6:21-22). Daniel and his companions are both examples of "loyal opposition." They are trustworthy and respected participants in the political sphere, but their alternative identity as God's covenant people causes them to respectfully and winsomely stand apart from certain idolatrous aspects of public life.

It should be noted that Daniel's Hebrew name never does disappear. By the reign of Darius, the Babylonian name seems to have dropped out completely. Even Nebuchadnezzar's own writing seems to suggest that Daniel is referred to primarily by his original name: "Daniel came before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my

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[9] This is somewhat comparable to the dynamics between Thomas More and Henry VIII; the monarch is deeply disturbed by the disapproval and resistance-through-non-participation of a trusted subject, and responds in great anger.

God" (4:8). The Babylonian name is clearly used in the conversations that Nebuchadnez-

zar recalls (4:9, 18, 19), yet Nebuchadnezzar now refers to him as Daniel (also in 4:19).

At very least, this makes it clear that, even in the eyes of the king who imposed the new

name in the first place, Daniel's Hebrew name and identity remain intact; the effort to

assimilate Daniel into Babylonian society was only partially effective.

Finally, we note that Daniel was explicitly aware of Jeremiah's predictions con-

cerning the return of the exiles after seventy years (9:2). While this introduces the latter

portion of his book, it is also significant in his long-term faithfulness as an exile. Just as

Jeremiah had called upon the exiles to do, Daniel had made a home in Babylon and had

sought the good of that land. However, he continually looked forward to the day when the

covenant people could leave that temporary home and return to the land of promise. Hope

is a strong element for the sojourner— one is able to continue resisting full assimilation

because of the homeland for which he longs.

Peter

Within New Testament literature, 1 Peter is the most explicit in adopting the "so-

journer" motif to describe Christian life. In fact, the motif serves as a bookend for the

epistle, which is addressed to "those who are elect exiles of the dispersion" (1:1). While

such a term could refer to the literal Jewish dispersion, the recipients most likely include

Gentiles.[10] These believers are in a state of exile in this world. Peter's final greeting,

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[10] See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Duane Garrett, eds., *Archeology Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 2014. "The terms 'pagans' (lit., 'the Gentiles') and 'idolatry' suggest that at least some of Peter's readers were Gentiles who had converted from a pagan lifestyle."

likewise, "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings" (5:13), highlights this theme. Babylon, the location of Judah's exile, is used to show that the church in question is simultaneously in a state of exile and chosen by God. This reference to Babylon is most likely figurative.[11]

The Christian experience of exile starts, for Peter, in regeneration, in which the Christian is "born again to a living hope…to an inheritance that is imperishable, unde-filed, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:3-5). The new birth reorients the Christian's existence; it is a life of hope. Salvation is spoken of in both present and future terms. This heavenly reality is currently stored up for us as we wait for it to be revealed in the future.

Peter exhorts believers to "conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile" (1:17), which implies that this time is limited; an end is in sight. This exile does not begin by an act of geographic displacement, but by that new birth, which re-moves sinners from their old way of life. Peter reminds them of that old way, warning against being "conformed to the passions of your former ignorance" (1:14). Holiness is expected of them because "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers" (1:18).

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[11] While it is possible that Peter was actually writing from Babylon, this city was far from domi-nant at this point in time; it is more likely that he was speaking figuratively. This could be a way of referencing Rome, as early Church tradition suggests that this was the place in which this letter was written. Additionally, Rome is connected with Babylon later in the Apocalypse. See Kaiser and Garrett, 2017, which points these things out but also allows a more general use of the term: "Because Old Testament Babylon was a notorious place of sin, that city's name had become shorthand for any place known for its wickedness."

Not only were Peter's Christians delivered from old ways; they had become a part of the covenant people of God. Echoing God's language to Israel after the Exodus (Ex 19:5-6) and re-appropriating Hosea 1:10 , Peter declares, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:9-10). Inclusion in the holy nation is not conditioned here upon physical descent, but upon being called from darkness to light.

This new citizenship creates a complex relationship with unbelievers. Immediately after identifying these believers as a "holy nation", Peter urges them, "as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:11-12). There is a sense of dissociation here; whatever the original national origin of these believers, "the Gentiles" are now spoken of in the third person; those who are a "holy nation" are distinct from to "the nations". This dissociation is echoed in 4:3. "The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do." Not only does this set the believers apart from the Gentiles; it suggests that at least a substantial number of those believers were at one time among them.

Yet the very commands prove that, while the believers have separated from their Gentile heritage in terms of primary identity and lifestyle, they have not abandoned Gentile communities. The new life is lived "among the Gentiles" (2:12). If it were not lived

among them, they would not be sojourners or exiles. But, as it is, believers carry a new identity and lifestyle within their original communities. Just as the exilic prophets point to the glory of God going forth through the exiled people, so Peter sees holy conduct amidst Gentile people as highly missional. Because of the honorable conduct of Christians, even Gentiles who slander them "may see your good deeds and glorify God" (2:12). Christians are to continue to respect the authority structures of the nations in which they find themselves, honoring emperors and governors (2:13-14). Servants are to continue obeying their masters, albeit they now do so out of reverence for God rather than fear of man (2:18-19). Wives are to be subject to husbands, winning over the disobedient by their respectful and pure conduct (3:1-2). They are to bear suffering with such hope, gentleness and respect that slanderers are put to shame (3:15-16). Peter assumes that mission goes forward when Christian exiles continue to participate in family, civic, and economic life alongside other members of their larger communities. Identity and lifestyle have been transformed, but relationships are to remain intact whenever possible.

Finally, Peter carries a strong element of hope into his discussion. As stated above, this exile is time-bound. He also reminds believers that "the end of all things is at hand" (4:7), offering this as a motivation for believers to live a life of self-control and sobriety; this is in contrast to the Gentile debauchery listed in 4:4-5. As in earlier examples, we see the hope of future salvation, associated with the end of all things, being used to encourage sojourners to maintain their distinctive identity in the meantime (or, as stated in 4:2, "for the rest of the time in the flesh"). Again, in a likely allusion to Daniel's account of the fiery furnace, Peter encourages people with the prospect of joy "when his

glory is revealed" (4:13) in the face of "the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you" (4:12).

This connection between good eschatological hope and enduring holiness is in 2 Peter 3, in which Peter invites believers to "lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming day of God" (2 Peter 3:11-12).

<center>Hebrews</center>

The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to a largely Jewish audience that, much as Peter's believers, had experienced significant persecution. The author calls this to mind, saying, "you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction" (Heb 10:32-33). These people were able to respond to hardship with joy because "you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one" (10:34). Though better and abiding, this possession has not yet been received. To use language from 1 Peter, it is "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you…ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:4-6). Thus, the people are urged to show endurance until the appointed time in which they will receive that which has been promised. The "Hall of Faith" of Hebrews 11 is set in this context. Throughout this chapter, several relevant themes emerge that are logically consistent with the "sojourner/exile" texts.

First, the exemplars of faith stand as outsiders in "the world," often suffering and struggling greatly because of that outsider status. Through his faith, Noah "condemned the world" (11:7). These exemplars are explicitly identified as "strangers and exiles on

the earth" (11:13). Moses scorned "the treasures of Egypt", preferring "to share ill-treatment with the people of God" (11:25-26). Rahab is juxtaposed with all of her countrymen, "those who were disobedient" (11:31). The group as a whole are described as "destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy" (11:37-38).

The identification of "these all" (11:13) as strangers and exiles follows the description of Abraham and Sarah's literal sojourning, but refers back at least to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, and seems an accurate description of all those not yet mentioned as well. What is literally true of Abraham is also spiritually true of all these "exiles." They are "seeking a homeland" (11:14), one that is "a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (11:16). This future-oriented certainty of what has not yet been seen permeates the text. One necessary aspect of faith is that you must believe that God "rewards those who seek him" (11:6). Abraham looked for the "city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (11:10). Jacob's act of faith was to invoke "future blessings" (11:20), and Joseph's was to give instructions about the return of his bones to the land of promise (11:22), showing that even though he would die in Egypt he identified with the land of promise as his true homeland. Moses was willing to suffer with God's people because "he was looking to the reward" (11:26). The promise of an abiding homeland sustains these "exiles" as they struggle within their more temporary contexts.

These same concepts are echoed again amidst the practical call to holy living in chapters 12 and 13. The kingdom that the saints will receive is one that can not be shaken, as opposed to the the earth and heavens that are destined to be removed (12:26-28).

The implication is clear: no eternal hope can be placed in that which is destined to be removed; thus, we should reverently pursue that which endures.

Jesus is the climactic exemplar of forward-looking faith. He endured the cross with a sort of reckless abandon, "despising the shame," because of "the joy that was set before him," and has already entered before us into the land of promise, "seated at the right hand of God" (12:2). He is also pictured as the ultimate outsider, suffering "outside the gate" (13:12). Readers are invited to "go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (13:12-13).

In Hebrews, the Christian is by nature a sojourner, somebody who willingly suffers the consequences of living as a "stranger and exile" in this world, because of hope in an enduring, yet-unseen heavenly home. We are invited to pursue this abiding home with full commitment, suffering joyfully through whatever may result from this alternative identity.

John

Without making heavy use of the vocabulary of the sojourner/exile motif, John helps us to understand the basic tension inherent in it: the sojourner has an *alternative identity* that distinguishes him or her from the world, yet is *engaged* in the life of the world to further the *missio dei* in the world.

John's use of "world" (κόσμος), is highly nuanced and has been well commented upon elsewhere.[12] For our purposes, it is important to point out that the three elements of the sojourner/exile motif are evident in Jesus' relationship with the world, and that of those who would follow him.

First, Jesus is identified as distinct from the world. As the eternal Word, he came down from heaven and returned to heaven, so that his time on this earth was in a very real way a time of sojourn. Thus, he states that he is not "of" or "from" the world, telling the Jews that he is "from above" and they are "from below" (Jn 8:23).

The same distinction is used to describe the relationship of his followers with the world. They are not of the world, they are warned against loving the world (1 Jn 2:15), and are those who have overcome the world (1 Jn 5:5). Clearly, though these believers do not belong to the world, this is true in a different sense. Whereas Jesus' distinction from the world comes from his eternal origin in heaven, these believers share a common human birth in this world. The distinction is not intrinsic to the very nature of believers, but is one made by God. It has less to do with origin than with orientation;[13] the believers are living in this world by the light that came down from heaven, and their existence is now ordered toward that which is heavenly.

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[12] For a fuller treatment, see Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downer's Grove, IL, 2014).

[13] Rainbow, 400, 401. "A line of demarcation divides those who belong to God from those who are of the world. Yet it is not a case of 'dualism,' of two essentially different races of human beings. God's children were once part of the world. God, not their intrinsic nature, set them apart… In the formulations 'from below' and 'of this world' the preposition *ek* indicates participation and shared characteristic, not ultimate origination, for all things were made by God through his Logos (Jn 1:3). To be 'from below' and 'of this world' means to have had a glimpse of the true light (John 8:12) and yet to have made the fateful choice to remain in the dark rather than to heed Jesus."

It is in this sense that John speaks of the world in profoundly negative terms. "The world lies under the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19) and hates believers because it hated Christ first (Jn 15:18). It does not know God (1 Jn 3:1) and is passing away (1 Jn 2:17). In this context, "world" refers specifically to those who have rejected the light and remain in the darkness.[14] Jesus' followers, as children of light, stand distinct from the world through their embrace of that light.

John's willingness to use the term "world" to describe humanity in rebellion against God surely says something of his views on human responsiveness; indeed, he says that "the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light" (Jn 3:19). Again, "we know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19). Those who are in the light provide the minority report. As Paul Rainbow states, "Nowhere does John speculate on how large a numerical proportion of the human race are non-elect, but his terminology gives the impression that they form the vast majority and control the visible institutions of society."[15] The Christian is, in Johannine literature as much as in Petrine writings, an outsider.

While a sharp distinction is made theologically between the Church and the World, the visible and social distinction can be hard to discern. Church and World are not separate social spheres. John is not so much arguing for Christians to hold a separate society, but a distinctly Godly life. So, while John holds up Jewish and Roman rejectors of Christ as representatives of the world, he also points to those who have been part of

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[14] Rainbow, 400-401.
[15] Rainbow, 129.

Christian communities.[16] "The world" can exist anywhere, even within the visible structures of the Church. It is not itself an institution, but an influence that can corrupt any institution, tempting individuals and societies away from the love of God by means of "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" (1 Jn 2:16).

Particularly in 1 John, in which "the world" has been manifested in heretical teachers springing up within the Church, this distinction has practical impact. The world is not resisted or overcome through intercultural conflict or cultural isolation, but rather through obedience to the will of God (1 Jn 2:17), through orthodox faith (1 Jn 5:5), and through abiding in Christ's love (1 Jn 3:23-24).

While the Christian is to be distinct from the world, John's treatment includes strong themes of deliberate Christian engagement in and mission to the world. This engagement begins with Christ himself. The "true light," who was not "of" the world "was coming into the world" (Jn 1:9). He was, in fact, sent into the world by the Father, because the Father loved the world. (Jn 3:16-17).

This coming was for many purposes. He came to give "light to everyone" (Jn 1:9), to take away "the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), "in order that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17), to "give life to the world" (Jn 6:33), to be "the light of the

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[16] Rainbow, 136. "John in his Gospel does indeed present 'the Jews' as representatives of the world. But he does so owing neither to their ethnicity, which he shared, nor to their religion, which he practiced in his early life and of which he viewed faith in Jesus as the fulfillment. His reason for castigating 'the Jews' is the same as his reason for taking aim at others besides Jews. In the figure of Pontius Pilate a claim to raw political power trumped the truth (Jn 18:33-38; 19:12-16). In the Johannine Epistles the world appears in the form of Christian heretics who deny the Father and the Son (1 Jn 2:18-19, 4:1-6, 2 Jn 7). In the Apocalypse the world is a Romanizing paganism that was impinging on the life of the churches in Asia Minor (Apoc 2:2, 6, 14-15, 20-24; 3:2-3, 15-17). As with the prophets of Israel and Judah, what John inveighs against is human unbelief and impenitence, wherever and however they show up."

world" (Jn 8:12), to "declare to the world what I have heard from [the Father]" (Jn 8:26), "so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn 14:31). The world is the very sphere from which the elect are called; they are "the people whom you gave me out of the world" (Jn 17:6). Though the world is a corrupted through unbelief and rebellion, it is also created and loved by God; "The world was made through him, yet the world did not know him" (Jn 1:10).

The Christian sojourner, according to John, is in the world not as a matter of un-fortunate happenstance, but is in the position of an outsider sent into the world on mission. In speaking of his disciples, Jesus says, "The world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world… As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (Jn 17:14-16, 18). The disciples stand in distinction from the world, but are sent in solidarity with Christ's mission. Again, speaking of those yet to believe, Jesus prays that they may experience unity comparable to his unity with the Father "so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you loved me" (Jn 17:23). John does not spell out the nature of the Church's mission, but suggests that the love and unity of Christians with God and one another will itself be revelatory.

For John, the Church is the body of people called out by God from among the world to a life in unity with the Father and the Son, sent into the world in solidarity with Christ's mission. This is, in Niebuhr's words, a "double movement from the world to God and from God to the world… [Christians] are forever being challenged to abandon all

things for the sake of God; and forever being sent back into the world to teach and practice all the things that have been commanded them."[17] The Church, like Christ, is distinct from, but incarnate in the world. It's distinction creates a constant source of conflict with the world; its presence invites whoever would believe into itself.[18]

Summary of the Biblical Motif

The many Scriptures cited above provide a composite picture of the Biblical sojourner, with the elements of *alternative identity* (fueled by eschatological hope)*, cultural engagement*, and *mission* recurring with sufficient frequency to be named the main markers of the sojourner and exile.

Christian distinctiveness is, in these texts, in no conflict with mission and engagement. In fact, the *missio dei* moves forward in precisely those moments in which the sojourner maintains that distinctiveness most faithfully. We need not draw a false dilemma for ourselves.

A strong sense of gentleness pervades all of these sojourner texts. As outsiders, Christians can live with the assumption that, even as God's mission goes forward and people and systems are drawn into the truth, much of the world remains under the power of the evil one. We can expect that this will involve significant pain and dissonance for us, in varying degrees in different times and places. This need not be a source of anger,

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[17] Niebuhr, 29.

[18] Niebuhr, 414. "According to John, the circle of Jesus' disciples is open and welcomes any from the surrounding society who will believe, but it remains a divinely stamped body that belongs to a realm other than the world and therefore finds itself embroiled in spiritual conflict until the end of the age."

but something received willingly; it is the predicted cost for any who would be a light in the darkness. When Christians, engaging in cultural battle, resort to anger and incrimination, we are not acting as sojourners in a world that is passing away, but as a party that is desperately trying to maintain power.

Finally, as we move forward into cultural and developmental theory, this biblical motif puts specific formational challenges before the Church: if we are to faithfully carry forward the *missio dei* in this time and place, we must be instrumental in forming Christians who embrace the alternative identity and lifestyle that comes with true discipleship, who are active participants in their broader culture, and who constantly maintain the eschatological hope that enables them to bear the cost of this lifestyle with joy.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Part 1- The Sojourner/Exile Principle and Cultural Theory

Christian cultural theorists have worked hard to speak coherently about the relationship between Church and culture, particularly struggling to define, in cultural terms, the nature and function of the Church. This work is complex, in part, because of the tension built into Christian existence as "sojourners and exiles." Whereas the Jewish exiles literally had a distinct geographic, ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage, Christians' identity as members of a distinct "nation" is a spiritual reality that coexists with membership in a diverse range of cultural entities. A rich range of metaphors, theories, and terminology have been developed in an attempt to speak truthfully about both of these realities.

Such attempts can be evaluated in light of the biblical "sojourner/exile" motif, and can assist us in thinking correctly about our attempts at living into that motif in this time and place.

A Unique and Parallel Culture

Rodney Clapp is quite explicit in stating that "the original Christians, in short, were about creating and sustaining a unique culture— a way of life that would shape character in the image of their God. And they were determined to be a culture, a quite

public and political culture, even if it killed them and their children."[1] Again, he states, "they saw themselves embodying a national, or social and political, way of life. Israel's story was, in a profound sense, their story—and they did not privatize, psychologize, and etherealize it to make it theirs." He recognizes that the Church is not a simply a spiritual gathering of people bound by a set of principles, but by our relationship to specific, historical acts of redemption wrought by God, and that our participation in the covenant makes us part of a historic nation, which has its own history, king, and way of life, even though it does not now dwell in its own land. In that sense, the Church is a "national" body with a history and culture of its own. That national and cultural life, however, exists within and alongside other national and cultural contexts. Clapp's contribution is to help us realize that, while Christians are "sojourners and exiles" in a spiritual sense, this reality is more than metaphorical; it is grounded in the distinct national history of the covenant people.

Lesslie Newbigin deals with the struggle to maintain a Christian "plausibility structure" within a hostile cultural context. While he holds out the theoretical possibility that, in a particular time and locale, "the Christian tradition can function as a plausibility structure which is not questioned"[2] his analysis is that in most places the Christian tradition is set alongside a competing plausibility structure dominant within a particular culture. In most contexts, he counsels the Christian to internalize the debate, that is, "to live within the biblical tradition, using its language as my language, its models as the models

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[1] Rodney Clapp, "Practicing the Politics of Jesus" in *The Church as Counterculture,* ed. Michael L. Budde, Robert W. Brimlow (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 18.
[2] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 65.

through which I make sense of experience, its story as the clue to my story, that I help to strengthen and carry forward this tradition of rationality."[3] while simultaneously seeking to continue "a member of contemporary British society I am all the time living in."[4] But this participation is less than complete: "What they call self-evident truths are not self-evident to me, and vice versa. When they speak of reason they mean what is reasonable within their plausibility structure. I do not live in that plausibility, but I know what it feels like to live in it. Within my own mind there is a continuing dialogue between the two."[5]

There is much to be said for Newbigin's approach. It involves true engagement with an opposing point of view, a sustained effort to understand the inner workings of its plausibility structure. This engagement is not a threat to his Christian identity because "insofar as my own participation in the Christian tradition is healthy and vigorous, both in thought and in practice, I shall be equipped for the external dialogue with the other tradition."[6] However, insofar as Newbigin treats himself as an observer of "contemporary British society," dwelling in it but not rightly belonging to it, his language is questionable. The non-Christian plausibility structure can not be precisely identified with "contemporary British society," because it is not held universally. Rather, there is a competition within that society between this dominant plausibility structure and that of the Christian tradition. Newbigin is not standing outside of his own society, looking in. Rather, he represents a minority report within that society, resisting a plausibility structure that seeks to impose itself on the whole culture. If we assume cultural uniformity, then Newbigin

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[3] Newbigin, 65.
[4] Newbigin, 65.
[5] Newbigin, 65.
[6] Newbigin, 65.

must be an outsider in his culture. But when there is debate within the culture, he is a prophetic, minority voice. He can fully dwell within the Christian tradition and within British culture, but only British culture understood in a non-uniform sense. This is one distinction between a literal "sojourner" who truly is an cultural outsider and the spiritual "sojourner" who is a prophetic presence within his or her native culture.

A "Special Kind of Club"

Kathryn Tanner unpacks the differing implications of modern and postmodern cultural theory. First, she distinguishes the anthropological definition of culture from "high culture." Anthropologically, culture is "an originally formative influence on individual personas and must as such be exercised primarily through unconscious means. Apart from any reflective choice or training, one simply finds oneself exhibiting the linguistic skills, tastes, and thought patterns of the people among whom one has been brought up."[7] High culture, on the other hand, is specialized, and passed along "through essentially reflective processes of 'reading, observing, and thinking.'"[8] Early generations of cultural anthropology work within a " modern" framework, in which cultures are units of consensus. The culture of a people group "tends to be conceived as their entire way of life, everything about the group that distinguishes it from others" and is "spread evenly throughout its membership."[9] While this understanding allows for divisions to exist within culture, with subgroups having their own distinct culture, these distinctions ultimately

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[7] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 13.
[8] Tanner, 13.
[9] Tanner, 27.

do not conflict with the essential commonalities of the broader culture. Generally, within this framework, cultural change occurs when an external influence acts upon that culture, when social circumstances change, or when individual members of the society are not properly socialized.[10] Within this modern framework, in which cultural boundaries are fairly clear, the Church could justifiably see itself as either a separate culture or else a very distinctive subculture. It also makes sense for certain defensive measures to be taken to protect that culture from the three major sources of change, listed above. These methods could involve the avoidance of outside influence through various forms of isolation, conservative campaigning within the broader cultural and political landscape to reduce the speed of social change, and attempts at shoring up the Church's formational programming.

Tanner summarizes the different ways in which, as the field of cultural anthropology has matured, this modern notion of culture has been criticized by recent scholarship:

> It seems less and less plausible to presume that cultures are self-contained and clearly bounded units, internally consistent and united wholes of beliefs and values simply transmitted to every member of their respective groups as principles of social order. What we might call a postmodern stress on interactive process and negotiation, indeterminacy, fragmentation, conflict, and porosity replaces these aspects…or, more properly as we will see, forms a new basis for their reinterpretation.[11]

Several useful and relevant conclusions emerge from Tanner's reflections on this postmodern notion of culture. First, she argues that we can still see culture as "an essentially

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[10] Tanner, 36.
[11] Tanner, 38.

consensus-building feature of group living," but that the consensus is "extremely mini-

malistic".

> It forms the basis for conflict as much as it forms the basis for shared be-
> liefs and sentiments. Whether or not culture is a common focus of *agree-*
> *ment*, culture binds people together as a common focus for *engagement*.
> The struggle over culture…presumes culture as common stakes: all parties
> at least agree on the importance of the culture items that they struggle to
> define.[12]

Thus, the very act of disagreement flows out of the priorities of a common life that make

our varied stances worth disagreeing about. The opposite of struggle is not necessarily

peace; sometimes, it is indifference. Within this framework, participation in cultural life

is not equated with conformity or agreement, but with true engagement.

Additionally, while Tanner still affirms that cultures differentiate their members

from those of other cultures, she accounts for this very differently.

> The distinctiveness of cultural identity is therefore not a product of isola-
> tion…Cultural identity becomes, instead, a hybrid, relational affair, some-
> thing that lives between as much as within cultures. What is important for
> cultural identity is the novel way cultural elements formed elsewhere are
> now put to work, by means of such complex and ad hoc relations process-
> es as resistance, appropriation, subversion, and compromise.[13]

While there is no reason to deny that, where isolation exists, a distinct culture develops,

Tanner's perspective here is helpful because of the near impossibility of being isolated in

any lasting way at this point in history. Rather than maintaining distinctiveness by dis-

tancing ourselves from the diverse and often troubling cultural content before us, our dis-

tinctiveness can emerge from our unique interaction with that content.

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[12] Tanner, 57, emphasis original.
[13] Tanner, 57-58.

Tanner disagrees with an attempt to refer to Christianity as a "culture" in the general sense of the term, stating,

> The majority view in Christianity for most of its history never favored efforts to make Christian social practices into the sort of social group that modern anthropologists would think of as possessing its own way of life. Thus, just as in the modern West, so in the first five centuries of the Common Era Christians continued to participate in many, though certainly not all, of the activities of the wider (in this case Roman) society in which they were placed; they usually withdrew only from those that seemed inextricably linked to pagan religious practices. Christian communities did not try to replace the educational, economic, familial, or political functions served by Roman institutions with their own.[14]

Certainly, while there are beliefs and practices shared broadly by Christians in distinction from others within their own local cultures, in many other ways Christians bear more similarity with non-Christians within their own cultures than with Christians from other cultures. It is thus not appropriate to say the Church functions as a self-standing culture.

Thus, Tanner describes the Church not as a distinct culture, but as "an association with initiation rites, a special kind of club unusual in its potential to produce close personal ties—a substitute family in that sense—among people of very different classes and circumstances, to provide its members with an abiding reference point for the direction of their lives whether in or out of such Christian company."[15] There is a two-way traffic between this "association" and the wider culture. Its life takes shape partially in response to its wider cultural setting, and it provides significant direction for its members even when they interact outside of its own sphere. Therefore, because we are reliant upon a host culture in which to function, any Christian "way of life," (and there are many) is "essentially

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[14] Tanner, 97.
[15] Tanner, 98.

parasitic…always the practices of others made odd."[16] No distinct "pure Christianity"

exists that does not share cultural items with its surrounding culture. Thus, a "distinctly

Christian way of life" forms not in isolation, but as a result of intense and deliberate in-

teraction with its the surrounding culture. In early Christianity, a Christian social ethic did

not come "by any blanket judgement about Roman social practices", but rather

> it arose in a step-by-step process of engagement with particulars. Trans-
> forming the use of shared items from a non-Christian to a Christian one is
> a piecemeal process, in short; the items of another culture are not taken up
> all at once but one by one or block by block. Indeed, if they are to be used
> differently, Christian practices cannot take up the elements of another way
> of life as they form a whole; a different use of them requires a form of se-
> lective attention by which they are wrested out of their usual contexts in
> another way of life. They must be disarticulated, so to speak, taken apart
> in order to be put together in a new way, to form a new pool of associa-
> tions or a new organization of elements with weightings different from
> what they had elsewhere.[17]

Tanner's description matches the messiness of actual experience; efforts to interact with

and respond to the totality of one's culture in light of the Word of God are difficult, un-

ending, and produce significant debate and disagreement both within the Christian com-

munity and with our companions in the broader culture. This also means that the practical

details of what it means to be authentically Christian might change over time. This is not

because the Word of God changes, but because Christianity only takes form when that

Word interacts with embodied human culture; as that culture changes, Christianity takes a

new shape.

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[16] Tanner, 113.
[17] Tanner, 117.

I have spent significant time interacting with Tanner because she provides a detailed theoretical framework for cultural interaction, within which many other commentators seem to be functioning.

Christians as Culture Creators

Andy Crouch works within this framework of permeable culture, without clear boundaries. He speaks of "cultural goods" more than "the Culture." "We are reminded of the danger of talking about 'the Culture,' as if it were an undifferentiated, single thing. Just as we must always ask which cultural goods are meant by a reference to 'Culture,' we must also ask which public receives and responds to those goods."[18] As stated above, interactions between Christians and their culture are not done in broad generalities, in "engagement with particulars", which gives us good reason to avoid broad statements about the relationship between "Christ and Culture". This particularity gives Crouch space for a high degree of practical realism, suitable for somebody with a "sojourner" self-understanding. A desire to "change the world" or "change the culture" in a generic sense is futile, partially because "the Culture" is a term with no specific meaning and partially because of the pervasiveness of sin in every aspect of human cultural interaction. Yet, we can bring change through measured and particular acts in which we create "cultural goods" that reflect the kingdom of God.[19] The *missio dei* goes forward in a particular time and place when Christians bring their alternative values, defined by that kingdom, into their own sphere of human interactions.

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[18] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 40.
[19] Crouch, 200.

Os Guinness, similar to Crouch in his belief that Christians have had, and will continue to have, a great role in culture creation, points out that measurable progress in creating culture tends to require "a long obedience over several generations, which requires a steady engagement with wider society through the callings of all believers in all their lives, which requires strong, stable lives lived in common, which requires a vibrant worshiping, teaching, and fellowshipping community."[20] If we contend that the *missio dei* moves forward when Christians faithfully maintain their distinctive identity and worldview as they interact with their broader cultures, and if we understand that mission as a slowly-unveiling work, then there is need for the Church to function as a distinct and enduring community in which the mission can be carried forward over the course of centuries. Amidst this community, individual Christians are formed by the struggles and insights of centuries of Christians who sought to be faithful within their own cultural contexts.

Prophetic, Pioneering Community

John Howard Yoder points out that our attempts to stand distinct from culture itself are prone to the theological error of "locating human sinfulness in culture rather than in the human heart."[21] It is impossible to separate the Church from "the world" simply by forming a separate society. Referring to the Johannine community, Yoder sees "not social withdrawal but radical monotheism, participating in that Lordship as they stood in the

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[20] Os Guinness, *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 62.
[21] Yoder, 35.

midstream of world events, but refusing to confess any other Lord."[22] Participation in the

life of one's society is not uniform, however. Similar to the young Hebrews participating

in Babylonian life but refusing to participate in acts of idolatry, Yoder argues that Chris-

tians should exercise discernment, intentionally withdrawing from certain activities that

are "less redeemable than others."[23] At other times, the Church is to make "tactical al-

liances"[24] with whatever aspects of culture serve the purposes of the kingdom. This sort

of carefully discerned engagement is a part of the Church's prophetic ministry to the so-

ciety. "The believing community's assignment is rather to represent within society,

through and in spite of withdrawal from certain of its activities, as well as through and in

spite of involvement in others, a real judgment upon the rebelliousness of culture and a

real possibility of reconciliation for all."[25]

Yoder develops upon the "Pioneering function" of the Christian community,

which he draws from Niebuhr. Under this approach, he resists "the model of the sect

which is related to God precisely in its opposition to the larger culture."[26] Rather, he

states, the Church functions in a way similar to Christ himself: "it can provide the model

of right response which will move the larger community of which it is a part… the church

is the sub-culture which first discerns what is required of the whole community…it can

lead society precisely because it is a representative of rather than inimical to society."[27]

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[22] Yoder, 88.
[23] Yoder, 86.
[24] Yoder, 171.
[25] Yoder, 70.
[26] Yoder, 118.
[27] Yoder, 118.

Bounded Minority Subculture

D.A. Carson compares the Church to an ethnic minority subculture. He recognizes that "'Christ' and 'culture' cannot be set absolutely over against each other, not only because Christians constitute part of the culture, but also because all authority is given to Christ in heaven and earth, so all culture is subsumed under his reign."[28] Yet he goes on to state that "they are distinguishable entities, but not mutually exclusive entities, in the same way that the Hispanic-American culture is distinguishable from the broader American culture yet an integral part of it. The broader American culture influences the Hispanic-American culture, and vice versa. Similarly Christ and culture: Christians…are simultaneously distinguishable from the larger culture and part of it; Christians influence the culture, and vice versa."[29] This metaphor bears some consideration, particularly if we think in terms of second-generation members of a minority community; the oft-repeated story is of the struggle to be American as well as to embrace the ethnic identity with which one was raised. One is immersed in American cultural life and contributing to this society, yet derives much in terms of identity and values from the distinctive community in which one is brought up. Difficult decisions of loyalty must be made when the values of the sub-community clash with the majority of the larger culture. At times, one must choose whether to embrace the alternative identity of the minority community, or to at

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[28] Carson, 63.
[29] Carson, 75.

least partially break from that community and follow more broadly-accepted norms. Carson sees this difficulty being behind the inevitable reality of Christian persecution.[30]

Carson also points out that the Christian community is "part of—but highly differentiable from—the larger culture."[31] For that differentiation, he points to Paul's strict application of rules of conduct for the Christian community and his lack of "immediate concern" over regulation of the life of other Roman citizens. A bounded community in which discipline and even excommunication are an option has the mechanisms to clearly uphold a distinct way of life within a larger culture.

However, Christian eschatology differentiates the experience of the Church from that of a minority subculture. Under most circumstances, most second-generation Americans are not "sojourners and exiles" precisely because they intend to live and die within this country. Such people are much more likely to conform to the majority culture than expatriates who fully intend to return to their homelands in due course. The Christian experience is comparable to the second-generation ethnic American in the sense that we are born within this culture and yet live within a distinctive subculture, and similar to an expatriate community in our expectation of departure to our true homeland. Christian youth, homeschooled or otherwise, whose peer interactions outside of the Christian community have been highly restricted and who have been trained to see themselves in strong distinction from their neighbors, may have significant experiential similarities to second-

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[30] Carson, 162. "The persecution presupposes a cultural clash: because the followers of Jesus live by a different set of norms, they are distinguishable from and sometimes objectionable to the larger culture in which they are embedded."
[31] Carson, 165.

generation immigrant youth, so their experience can be particularly instructive in this context.

Stealth Resistance Movement

Marianne Sawicki, in her discussion of the early "paleochurch," points to an approach that bears similarity to the advice of Jeremiah to the exiles, which she calls "a theology of digging in and staying put."[32] For her, the kingdom of God is sought resistively."[33] It relies (much like Tanner's "parasitic" Church) on the continued existence of the Roman empire, within which it functions as a "stealth operation."[34] If the kingdom is being sought in the midst of the empire, it is seen "in terms of what the empire is not," thus undermining the empire's "perceived reasonableness, its aura of efficiency and inevitability."[35] Christian distinctiveness, then, is contextual, emerging when kingdom values are upheld within the immediate imperial context. There is much to be said for Sawicki's approach, particularly the advice that the Church today pursue the kingdom through "small-scale refusals to comply with the alleged inevitability of the pomps and glamours of middle-class life."[36] These refusals stem from an alternative set of values and, when chosen after thoughtful consideration of our cultural contexts and the values of the kingdom of God, can be a powerful testimony to the Gospel.

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[32] Marianne Sawicki, "Salt and Leaven: Resistances to Empire in the Street-Smart Paleochurch." In *The Church as Counterculture*, ed. Michael L. Budde, Robert W. Brimlow (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 60.

[33] Sawicki, 79.

[34] Sawicki, 67.

[35] Sawicki, 70.

[36] Sawicki, 79.

The weakness in Sawicki's approach is that it has no eschatology. She sees the "paleochurch" seeking the kingdom through these small-scale methods because it "looks for the kingdom of God in the midst of occupied Palestine and Syria, not on some far shore where oppression has been left behind."[37] Even when Jeremiah urges sojourners and exiles to settle down and make a home for themselves within their displaced contexts, these exhortations were accompanied by a promise of an end to the displacement. It is difficult to imagine the development of an enduring resistive Church that is able to withstand persecution without hope of a greater home beyond this present world and state of affairs. Enduring Christian distinctiveness does not emerge from the conviction that there is "no escape, no place to go to get away from the civil and personal evils confronting"[38] us, but by the assurance that "after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you" (1 Peter 5:10).

Cultural Poachers

Michael Warren defines culture as "a system of signs that successfully imprints in people the implicit and explicit codes undergirding a social order and its economic system."[39] By this definition, Warren describes religions as "true cultures, though they exist within a wider culture."[40] He argues that, while both the Church and the wider culture

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[37] Sawicki, 67.

[38] Sawicki, 60.

[39] Michael Warren, "Decisions that Inscribe Life's Patterns." In *The Church as Counterculture*, ed. Michael L. Budde, Robert W. Brimlow (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 134.

[40] Warren, 135.

provide norms, those of the culture tend to be implicit, being communicated "silently, claimlessly."[41] Religious norms, meanwhile, are more explicitly stated and have a kind of "ultimacy"— because they come from God, "these norms are worth living for and dying for," and they also "offer cautionary judgments on the codes of the wider culture.[42] For Warren, the Church needs to pay attention to how it lives alongside a consumerist culture, whose norms, "incessantly but implicitly communicated, seem to overwhelm the explicit, seemingly ultimate, nor often articulated explicit norms of religion."[43] The near omnipresence of electronic media creates a new situation, in which "assemblies gathering weekly around the altar" face a real struggle at the task of "minting their alternate view of the world."[44]

Kevin Vanhoozer similarly recognizes the formative effect that the popular media and other ubiquitous cultural goods are having upon all of us, particularly the young. He describes media as illocutionary (descriptive) and perlocutionary (persuasive). Popular media is so effective in forming one's view of what is and ought to be because of the cumulative effect of these illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, repeated in many cultural products over time.[45] Vanhoozer argues, however, that with intentionality the Christian does not need to become victim to the worldview presented by popular culture. His language is not of the Church as a parasite on the popular culture, but of "'adapting' or

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[41] Warren.
[42] Warren.
[43] Warren, 136.
[44] Warren, 134.
[45] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture." In Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 31.

'poaching' elements from the dominant systems. Adopting the term "excorporation", he argues that "cultural agents can use the locutions of popular culture (e.g., clothes, films) to perform new illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. We can speak our meaning with their language."[46] Vanhoozer invites the Church to intentionally study the culture in which it is placed, both so we can better understand the influences that are and have been subtly working on us and so we can "embody our faith in shapes of everyday life."[47] Vanhoozer connects here multiple elements identified as belonging to sojourner motif: critical *engagement* with cultural content serves to help Christians to maintain their *alternative identity* by helping us to understand and consciously evaluate the positive or negative impact of cultural material on our worldview, and aids the cause of *mission* by giving us an opportunity to incarnate the faith in the language of shared cultural inheritance.

<center>Independent Social Sphere</center>

Rodney Stark, examining the growth of Christianity throughout history, offers evidence that gives us reason to be hopeful even in a social setting in which the Christian worldview is a minority among a wide range of competing truth claims. His understanding of the social function of the Church is similar in description (though superior in vocabulary) to Tanner's "special kind of club." First, he describes the Church as "an inde-

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[46] Vanhoozer, 56. Senior High students at Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church in Danvers, MA watched and discussed "The Shawshank Redemption" in Spring of 2015. Adults in the church expressed concern, claiming that the portrayal of a Christian hypocrite as the main antagonist betrayed an anti-Christian bias. However, students led the conversation in a different direction, seeing the movie as an allegory around eschatological hope, with Andy as a Christ figure. They quickly dismissed the antagonist as "like the Pharisees." The same content had opposite worldview impacts on different people, depending on the use to which it was put.

[47] Vanhoozer, 16.

pendent social sphere wherein high status was entailed by positions within the group, whatever one's status outside— a separate world wherein a high city official and a slave could meaningfully call one another 'brother.'"[48] Perhaps "independent social sphere" is more descriptive than "club," in that it expresses the reality that this community has its own identifying markers, hierarchy, and membership, even when its members exist within a broader society with its own norms. Ward argues that religious convictions are better maintained when such a community exists within a pluralist context. Agreeing with Christian Smith, he states that "people don't need to agree with all their neighbors in order to sustain their religious convictions; they only need a set of like-minded friends."[49] Stark, citing developments particularly within Latin American Roman Catholicism, argues that strong competition with other worldviews and religious movements tends to significantly strengthen religious commitment, because the sheer struggle to survive requires a degree of religious zeal.[50]

For Stark, conversion is "primarily about bringing one's religious behavior into alignment with that of one's friends and relatives, not about encountering attractive doctrines. Put more formally: people tend to convert to a religious group when their social ties to members outweigh their ties to outsiders who might oppose the conversion, and this often occurs before a convert knows much about what the group believes."[51] In sociological terms, Stark argues that people generally act to conserve "religious capital,"

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[48] Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (Broadway, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011),150.
[49] Stark, 358.
[50] Stark, 404.
[51] Stark, 67.

which he defines as "the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture."[52] The more heavily invested an individual is in the identity, doctrine, values, and lifestyle of the social/cultural sphere of the Church, the more likely that person is to continue embracing that alternative way even when faced with significant pressure to conform from outside of that sphere.

<p style="text-align:center">Authoritative Community</p>

The Commission on Children at Risk has coined the term "authoritative community," which it defines as "groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life."[53] Families and churches are both authoritative communities, reminiscent of Tanner's "club," which functions as "a substitute family." Pulling from diverse disciplines, such as sociology and neuroscience, they demonstrate the importance of connectedness to community in the process of development of children and youth. While the Church understands itself to be more than simply an "authoritative community", it is not less. Therefore, the list of characteristics that define such a community is important for us as we seek to be the sort of communities that are instrumental in the formation of identity, worldview, and values in our members. These characteristics are:

(1) It is a social institution that includes children and youth.
(2) It treats children as ends in themselves.
(3) It is warm and nurturing.
(4) It establishes clear limits and expectations.

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[52] Stark, 74.

[53] The Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003), 14.

(5) The core of its work is performed largely by non-specialists.
(6) It is multi-generational.
(7) It has a long-term focus.
(8) It reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person.
(9) It encourages spiritual and religious development.
(10) It is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor.[54]

While all of these points can be applied to a healthy church community, the multi-genera-

tional aspect is worth noting, as churches and ministries within churches often fall prey to

age-segregation. The study highlights the need for "shared memory," which comes from

the interactions of multiple generations. "Shared memory says: This is where we came

from. This is what happened. This helps explain why we are who we are. We heard the

stories; we tell the children; we remember."[55] In a Christian context, it means that the

young do not just have a solitary experience of seeking to respond to the Word of God in

their own time and place, but are part of a community that passes down the wisdom, lan-

guage, and worship of centuries of Christians. When youth and children are surrounded

and influenced primarily by others in a similar stage of identity and value formation,

identity and values will lack this experience and wisdom. Even a small number of gen-

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[54] The Commission on Children at Risk, 34. This final characteristic is potentially problematic. Elsewhere the study is very open to the reality of pluralism; different authoritative communities will socialize children and youth within their own distinctive set of values. Public policy makers are encouraged to encourage the development of these communities because they meet the inherent need for connectedness in children. Yet here a very distinctive worldview point is being put up as a criterion for the type of group that should be supported. This is either built upon a false assumption that every authoritative community would naturally maintain this "universal" teaching, or else is applying a norming standard that supersedes the standards of the individual communities. While Christian communities do meet this criterion, it is difficult to be confident that we will continue to be perceived as meeting it in time to come, as the majority-perceived definition of "love of neighbor" changes. It is well within the range of possibility that this sort of criteria could be used to provide support only to those organizations that can fall under the umbrella of a more generic public (majority) set of values.
[55] The Commission of Children at Risk, 37.

uine intergenerational relationships offer great influence in the formation process; if those relationships are in the context of a believing Christian community, the formational impact is considerable.

The study also specifically recommends that authoritative communities give special attention to "the gendered needs of adolescents."[56] When adults in community do not pay attention to this, youth are left to their own devices and the popular culture to form sexual identity. This creates "adolescent-created rituals of transitions that are far less likely to be pro-social in their meaning and outcomes."[57] In traditional cultures, the authoritative community mobilizes to "define and enforce the social meaning of sexual embodiment…These mobilizations are commonly expressed through sex-specific rituals, tests, and rites of passage."[58] While the Church seeks holiness, not just pro-social behavior, it must create the context in which elders can speak clearly into the sexual confusion with which youth are surrounded.

<center>Points of General Application</center>

Several broad principles of application emerge from this study of the Biblical motif and cultural commenters:

First, the very fact that Christians live within this world means that we are on mission. The mission is God's mission, and is not restricted to organized or overt evangelism and service efforts. That mission takes place in the midst of our interactions with "cul-

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[56] The Commission of Children at Risk, 49.
[57] The Commission of Children at Risk, 25.
[58] The Commission of Children at Risk, 24.

ture" on the broadest level— God's saving purposes move forward when his people live in union with him within the spheres of family, work, civic life, arts, etc. There is a "conversation" already going on within our culture about what is true and right and beautiful, and we are called to take part in it as witnesses to God's Word.

Second, and because of this fact, the Christian life is generally meant to be lived in the world, through relationships, interaction, and cooperation with those outside of the Church community. The Church does not exist to insulate believers from the world, creating a separate "Christian" sphere of music, entertainment, business, and social contacts within which to "live, move, and have our being".

Third, Christians are distinct in that we live in the broader world according to the light of God's Word. The reason there can be no separated "Christian" sphere is that there is no "secular" sphere; the whole world belongs to Christ, and Christians carry their distinctive, kingdom-oriented identity, values, and truth claims into whatever spheres we enter.

Fourth, the Church is a family-like community in which those alternative norms are upheld, passed on, and reinforced. While most Christians do not spend the majority of their time within the social sphere of the Church, the relationships and communal practices of this community have a formative effect that forges and maintains a distinctive way of relating to the broader culture.

Fifth, Christians embracing the implications of the Gospel should expect to find themselves in the position of outsiders. We will respond to elements of our culture with different criteria and will come to different conclusions. While this need not lead to a

wholesale rejection of culture, it may mean that we need to distance ourselves from some aspects of popular culture and public life. To one degree or another, it will result in discomfort, disagreement, and marginalization. This should be neither a surprise, or a cause for anger; it is simply the state of things in a world system that has rejected the light. We must be inured to this reality. Otherwise, we will either make a series of small concessions that remove the discomfort but compromise Christian distinctiveness, or we will become defensive and adversarial, as if we can conquer the world through argumentation. We can not, but we can witness gently and respectfully to the truth, opening up new horizons of kingdom possibilities within our various social spheres.

Sixth, Christian communities must maintain a robust eschatology that orients believers toward the hope that is before us; this hope is a necessary ingredient for any community that will persevere in maintaining a costly distinctiveness. This eschatology is both expressed by speaking clearly of the future hope before Christians, and by reframing present suffering in light of that future hope.

Part 2- Directing the Formative Influence of Popular Media- Major Strategic Categories and Developmental Realities

While Part 1 of this chapter has sought to lay down principles of interaction with one's broader culture, this next section will now seek to examine literature that discusses the ways in which popular electronic media is contributing to the formation of adolescents, and examining three strategic categories of approaches that have been taken to direct this formation in a positive direction. From this study emerge organizing principles

for the development of ministry methodology that helps Christian high school students to build boundaries, skills, and habits to engage with popular electronic media[59] culture in a way that continues to foster a distinctively Christian identity and way of life as one becomes a true participant in the conversation into which these media invite us all.

The principles laid out here are also intended to be of value in communication with parents. I am not intending in this context to call into question the decisions of parents of children to impose limitations in the consumption of popular media, both in terms of quantity and content. However, the research listed below suggests that middle adolescence[60] brings with it new developmental realities that create circumstances in which openness to interaction with the divergent voices of popular culture is not only responsible, but is an important tool for youth in the development of their faith. This research gives can help to allay unnecessary fears that cause parents to hold their adolescents back from healthy engagement with popular culture, and gives some principles that help them to usher these adolescents more fully into their broader cultural context.

Categories of Media Effects

While it is broadly agreed that media is highly formative for adolescents, it is necessary to spell out the different ways in which this formation is occurring. Potter, in

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[59] By "popular electronic media," we refer specifically to those products of electronic media designed for mass consumption, i.e. movies, television, recorded music, and mass advertisement. "What seems to define [popular culture] is that in contrast to high culture it's relatively cheap, readily available and requires no previous education in order to understand and enjoy it." Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly About Style, Media and Entertainment* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 36.

[60] "Middle adolescence" refers here specifically to youth aged 14-16, roughly equivalent with high school years.

his textbook on Media Literacy, notes that, while much of the discussion and research around media effects focuses on behavior, there are several other categories of effects which must be considered, including "cognitive, belief, attitudinal, emotional, and physiological effects."[61] Cognitive effects, he argues, include both factual and social information. "The mass media provide an enormous number of models and actions from which children might learn. Given the large amount of time children spend with the media, pictorially mediated models (especially television and movies) exert a strong influence on children's learning about social situations."[62] This social modeling continues for adults; "when we do not have the social models we need in our real lives, we can usually find them in the media."[63] Belief effects can be direct, as in situations when we "simply decide whether to accept or reject [beliefs expressed by characters]" or they can gradually evolve "as we watch what people and characters do in a variety of situations."[64] Attitudes are the judgments we make based upon the standards of measurement that we hold. Those standards, according to Potter, may be shaped by the media to some degree, as in a situation where our standards for health and beauty are formed by "years of observing glamorous men and women in Hollywood movies, fashion magazines, and internet sites."[65] In terms of long-term emotional and physiological effects, Potter cites desensitization as an example.[66] See the section below on media violence below for more on this. When media has an effect on us that we do not intend, this frequently occurs "when you are in the state

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[61] W. James Potter, *Media Literacy*, 7th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 281.
[62] Potter, 282.
[63] Potter, 282.
[64] Potter, 282.
[65] Potter, 282-283.
[66] Potter, 284.

of automaticity because your defenses are not engaged. You are not aware that any learning is taking place, and hence you are not actively evaluating and processing the information. However, even when you are trying to be an active viewer, unintended effects can occur."[67]

Potter distinguishes between "manifested effects," which are observed, and "process effects," which influence somebody over a period of time, though those effects are not yet objectively observable. While much research is geared toward measuring manifested effects, as they are empirically observable, he argues that media literacy education needs to be more concerned with process effects. He speaks of one's "baseline" as "our typical degree of risk of experiencing an effect,"[68] which is not necessarily constant. "Fluctuation effects" are distinct events that "temporarily change that risk level."[69] If that fluctuation brings one over the "manifestation level," then an observable effect will emerge. If an attitude or desire is aroused through media consumption, manifest in behavior, then this is an observable media effect. The question of whether an effect will be manifested is dependent largely on the baseline. "Some people are conditioned in a way that their baseline is very close to the manifestation level, so it does not take much in a media exposure to result in an effect being manifested. In contrast, other people have been conditioned in a way that their baseline is very far away from the manifestation level, so it is unlikely that any one media exposure will result in an observable effect."[70] This becomes particularly relevant because the baseline is not constant, but is constantly

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[67] Potter, 288.
[68] Potter, 299.
[69] Potter, 299.
[70] Potter, 300.

being shaped in ways that may move us closer to the point of manifestation, or further

away. Potter lists seven factors that influence one's baseline: developmental maturities,

cognitive abilities, knowledge structures, sociological factors, lifestyles, personal locus,

and media exposure habits.[71] Among these are a few points of note. First, he argues that

those "who have been consistently socialized with particular values for a long period will

have a relatively weighty baseline—that is, the baseline will be very resistant to

change."[72] This would imply that those who have experienced constant, daily, deliberate

Christian formation carry a built-in resistance to unintended media impact. However, as

adolescents have limited life experience, there are a significant number of areas (i.e., sex-

uality) in which they have not been greatly socialized; in such areas, the baseline of any

adolescent would be less weighty.

Rose Kundanis summarizes the findings of a 1992 study produced by an APA task force

on television and society, which develops three basic assumptions:

> 1. All television is educational television.
> 2. Television often influences viewers by…the 'drip' model, a process of
> subtle and gradual incorporation of frequent and repeated messages.
> 3. Effects of television on any individual depend on the characteristics and
> goals of the viewers as well as the content of what is watched.[73]

The first point is in agreement with Potter's description of the breadth of media effects.

The second point gives language to the gradual nature of process effects. The third point

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[71] Potter, 301-305.

[72] Potter, 303.

[73] Rose Kundanis, *Children, Teens, Families, and Mass Media: The Millennial Generation*.
(Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 71. Citing A.C. Huston, E. Donnerstein, H.
Fairchild, N.D. Feshbach, P. Katz, J.P. Murray, et al. (1992). *Big World, Small Screen: The Role of
Television in American Society*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 6.

is consistent with the variability of effects based upon the baseline of each individual and

the factors effecting the weightiness of that baseline.

Media as Agent of Socialization

Arnett argues that adolescents are more likely than adults or children to use the

media for the purposes of self-socialization, as "familial sources of childhood socializa-

tion have diminished and sources of adult socialization are not yet present."[74] It also

gives them "a sense of being connected to a larger peer network" providing an immediate

common currency of film, television, music, and advertisement for youth even if they

move to a different part of the country.[75] The difficulty is that, unlike the socialization of

parents, teachers, churches, and others within one's community, the content of this social-

ization is being provided by those whose have a strong commercial interest in providing

youth with "whatever it is they believe adolescents want," creating a context in which,

while youth have access to a diversity of content, that content is able to work separate

from and often counter to the input coming from one's immediate community.[76] Among

other results, Arnett notes "a lack of integration in their socialization, in the sense that the

socialization messages they receive from the media (and sometimes peers) may differ

from the ones they receive in their families, schools, and communities. The independence

and diversity of this may be exciting…However, the contradictions among the messages

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[74] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Adolescents' Uses of Media for Self-Socialization," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence 24*, no. 5 (1995): 520.
[75] Arnett, 524.
[76] Arnett, 524.

may also be confusing."[77] Indeed, it is difficult to know how a schema being constructed from content marketed to the immediate interests and desires of adolescents could be anything but diffuse.

Reed Larson studies adolescent media use in the privacy of their own bedrooms. He argues that adolescents, despite popular impressions, do not spend a significantly greater percentage of their time in the presence of friends, but do spend more time alone than preadolescents.[78] He argues that solitude creates the time and space needed for the "cultivation of the private self," in which adolescents make heavy use of media.[79] He notes that music, rather than television, is a tool being used for this work, positing that this is because music tends to be drawn from adolescent culture, whereas TV has "lesser engagement with adolescent issues."[80] It could be argued that, with the greater diversity of targeted television content, and the prevalence of television viewing in the privacy of one's bedroom, this may be less true now than at the time of publication.

Weber and Mitchell use the analogy of construction materials when discussing the impact of media consumption on the creative work of young people. "Youth often take up or consume popular images, and combine, critique, adapt, or incorporate them in their new media productions… The identities emerging through multimedia production retain races of the original materials, faint outlines of the building blocks as it were… Identity construction involves improvising, experimenting, and blending genres, patching together

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[77] Arnett, 530.

[78] Reed Larson, "Secrets in the Bedroom: Adolescents' Private Use of Media." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence 24,* no. 5 (1995): 540.

[79] Larson, 541.

[80] Larson, 544.

contrasting or even contradictory elements, creating and modifying meanings to suit the context and in response to the requirements, affordances, and meanings of the situation."[81] This perspective, drawn from observations of the creative work of youth, is balanced. It recognizes that the media being consumed by adolescents are stocking the imaginative landscape with raw material, along with other inputs, but also makes it clear that the use that youth will make of these materials is not predetermined.

Dana Lemish, analyzing the media behavior of immigrant communities, notes that immigrant children, particularly in earlier phases when they have not yet developed connections with local children outside of the immigrant community, make heavy use of television to learn about their new society, tending to believe that it accurately reflects the nature and norms of that society, and that this media socialization works counter to the desires of migrant adults who are seeking to preserve their own cultural identity and maintain segregation. While this can cause a rift between first- and second-generation immigrants, it can conversely contribute to the formation of negative stereotypes on the part of these immigrants and increase the sense of isolation.[82] This could be of particular relevance in the case of youth in home-based education, as a limited network of connections outside of the Christian community creates an isolation not unlike that of an immigrant community, and media interactions both satisfy curiosity about the broader culture and can also contribute to a sense of cultural distance from one's neighbors.

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[81] Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell, "Imaging, Keyboarding, and Posting Identities: Young People and New Media Technologies." David Buckingham, ed., *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2008), 27, 39, 43-44.
[82] Dana Lemish, *Children and Media: A Global Perspective* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 152-153.

Avignon notes that the viewing of R-rated movies leads to "decreased church attendance and salience of religious faith, but it does not influence certainty and selective acceptance of religious beliefs." He posits that this decrease in religious practice is a result of cognitive dissonance created when familial factors favor one's religious belief while media and peer influences do not.[83] It appears that, when this dissonance does not wipe out one's religious beliefs or identity, the diffused character formation that result from it can lead to a lower level of practical commitment to one's faith.

<center>Formation of the Imagination</center>

James K.A. Smith, writing within a specifically Christian context, is concerned that conversation about media effects go beyond discussion of the formation of beliefs and worldviews into the realm of the imagination. In an extended discussion of the formation occurring in shopping malls, he argues that the primary locus of formation in this context is not that of beliefs, but of affections and desires.[84] It is common for us to pay attention to the formation of ideas and doctrines, but our actual decisions are so often not based upon abstract ideas, but "stories, legends, myths, plays, novels, and films" tend rather to deliver "a vision of the good life…painting a picture of what it looks like for us to flourish and live well."[85] This way of understanding the world, or "social imaginary,"[86] is often "acquired without our knowing it,"[87] built more by stocking our imagination

[83] Phil Avignon, "The Effects of R-Rated Movies on Adolescent and Young Adult Religiosity: Media as Self-Socialization," *Review of Religious Research 55* (2013): 615-618.
[84] James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 24.
[85] Smith, 53.
[86] Smith, 68.
[87] Smith, 85.

through images and practices than through directly presenting beliefs and ideas for con-

sideration and adoption.

In this vein, Henry Giroux recognizes the ability of film "to expand the power of

culture through an endless stream of signifying practices, which prioritize the pleasures

of the image over the intellectual demands of critical inquiry."[88] Because the imagination

is being formed in these moments of relaxation and enjoyment, when the critical capaci-

ties are often being given a time to rest, this formation can happen without knowledge or

consent. For this reason, and because its films are geared toward such young children,

Giroux claims that Disney films "possess at least as much cultural authority and legitima-

cy for teaching specific roles, values, and ideals as more traditional sites of learning such

as the public schools, religious institutions, and the family. Disney films combine an ide-

ology of enchantment and aura of innocence in narrating stories that help children under-

stand who they are, what societies are about, and what it means to construct a world of

play and fantasy in an adult environment."[89]

The subtlety of the cultural formation being accomplished by popular media,

stocking the social imaginary with images that inform our perceptions of what is good

and normal, points to just how difficult it is to control the cultural impact of media

through censorship based upon content advisories, or through consciously engaging with

the beliefs, norms, and worldview categories made explicit in the media. Because there

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[88] Henry A. Giroux, *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence, and Youth* (New York: Rutledge Publish-
ers, 1996), 91.
[89] Giroux, 90.

are multiple dimensions of formation taking place, it should not be surprising that that

approaches taken to directing this formative influence are quite diverse.

Defining the Task: The Problem of Language

As we are becoming more aware of the pervasiveness of the impact of electronic

media, a growing body of literature is developing, providing direction in how to limit,

control, direct, or counter this influence. While any of these actions might be a laudable

goal, depending on the content and potential impact of any cultural artifact, the term "di-

recting," when applied to the impact of popular electronic media, has the broadest appli-

cation. Language of "countering" or "limiting" the formative power of the media assumes

that these media are detrimental, either thoroughly or at least beyond a certain threshold.

Language of "controlling" becomes increasingly untenable as adolescents increase in in-

dependence.

When we speak of "directing" the effects of popular electronic media, we do so

with the assumption that media broadly, and a substantial proportion of cultural artifacts

individually, can not be treated as wholly consistent with principles of the Kingdom, nor

as wholly inconsistent, but as containing great diversity, both in terms of the level of

agreement of Christian principles with the assertions, assumptions, and images presented,

and in their overall impact on the identity, values, and imagination of Christians who in-

teract with them. In the body of relevant literature, three main strategic categories stand

out in which many principles and methods suggested for this directive work can be con-

solidated. Each of these strategic categories can be seen in light of a similar aim: to create

conditions for true positive impact and to limit the potential for negative impact on the formation of Christian identity, values, and imagination. This is what we mean by "directing" the effects of popular media.

Category 1: Cultural Abstinence- The Development of Boundaries

For the purposes of this study "cultural abstinence" is the reduction or limitation of interaction with popular electronic cultural material. In the context of children and youth, this limitation would be put into place, at least initially, by parents or guardians, or by public institutions for the sake of the welfare of young people. As adolescents increase in independence and the number of external controls decrease, such limitations may become self-imposed. The strategy of abstinence is particularly relevant in cases in which interaction with a cultural product is calculated to have harmful impact on one's well-being or faith development. In cases where this deleterious impact is projected for all populations, the strategy of abstinence can apply more broadly, as in the case of pornographic material, which has a negative impact, relationally and in terms of sexual imagination, for people of all ages.[90] Much attention has been given to the development of appropriate boundaries around media depictions of violence, non-pornographic depictions of sexuality, and content contrary to Christian belief.

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[90] Luke Gilkerson, "Your Brain on Porn*." CovenantEyes* (2014), accessed April 20, 2017. http://www.covenanteyes.com/brain-ebook/.

Media Depictions of Violence

Literature on violent content in the media falls under several categories, including neurological research, behavioral research, learning theory.

David Walsh reviews "brain-based research" on media violence. Brain scans show a simultaneous activation of the amygdala, the "anger center in the brain," while viewing television violence, while another study shows that "violent video games increase levels of aggression hormones in teen players."[91] Yet another study shows a lingering effect of violent gaming on the brain; those who had played violent video games had an ongoing reduction of activity in the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for decision-making.[92]

A large body of research is growing that measures the observable effects of violent media exposure, with longitudinal research being designed more and more to isolate causality around media exposure. A good deal of this research breaks down popular assumptions.

While it is generally assumed that parental restrictions on violent media content should decrease as a child becomes older, research shows that some violent content, particularly that which has a high degree of realism and that which requires a degree of abstract thought to understand (i.e. nuclear holocaust) cause a greater amount of fear for older children who are able to understand the content as something that could potentially occur in real life.[93]

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[91] David Walsh, *Why do they Act that Way?: A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen.* New York: Free Press, 2004. 165.
[92] Walsh, 166.
[93] Kundanis, 61.

However, the presence or lack of negative emotional responses to media violence are not in themselves accurate indications for whether violent content is appropriate for a young person. Kundanis points out that children who are less disturbed by violence are actually more likely to behave violently than those who are not bothered; this sense of ease with violent content is often indicative of unhealthy desensitization, yet these children are often given more freedom to view violent content because they do not overtly respond to it.[94]

Also counter-intuitively, Beaumont suggests that we should be concerned when on-screen violence is not depicted in a realistic manner. Because the devastating consequences of violence are not graphically shown, the work becomes more palatable to viewers but may actually cause more harm because "unrealistic violence can glorify violence or make it look like harmless fun."[95]

However, Kirsh finds that cartoon violence, low on realism, does not result in as much aggressive behavior as more graphic or realistic violence, though he finds that even this does increase one's tendency toward violent behavior through a process of "disinhibition," in which the viewing of violent media can "remove/reduce (i.e., disinhibit) reservations that youth might have with regard to performing aggressive acts already in their repertoire."[96] He argues that aggressive behavior is triggered much more significantly

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[94] Kundanis, 115, citing T.H.A. Van der Voort, P. Nikken, J.E. van Lil, "Determinants of parental guidance of children's television viewing: A Dutch replication study," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media 36 (Winter, 1992):* 61-74.

[95] Douglas M. Beaumont, *The Message Behind the Movie: How to Engage with a Film Without Disengaging Your Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 55.

[96] Steven J, Kirsh, *Children, Adolescents, and Media Violence: A Critical Look at the Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 168.

when the violence depicted is not comedic, as if "the presence of comedy during the car-

toons may have camouflaged the violence depicted within, thereby reducing its influence

on aggressive behavior in youth."[97] So, these positions can apparently be reconciled by

arguing that the issue at hand is comedic content, not realism.

Though parents are often advised to view media with their children if violent or

otherwise potentially harmful content is present, this practice of "co-viewing" is shown to

be counter-productive. "Far from reducing aggressive tendencies, recent research has

shown that co-viewing mediation is associated with *higher* levels of aggressive behavior

in youth."[98] This refers to situations in which parents view media with children and do

not engage conversationally or otherwise with the content; apparently, silence communi-

cates approval.

Finally, behavioral research shows that the "catharsis effect," through which con-

sumption of violent media content fulfills and satiates one's violent impulses, is not veri-

fiable, but has consistently been shown to be false. Kirsh summarizes review of research

on the catharsis effect, arguing, "For the last 50 years, not only has research consistently

failed to empirically support the catharsis effect, but frequently the opposite effect has

been found, in that aggressive experiences result in increases in aggressive behavior. Fur-

thermore, along with aggressive actions, both talking (i.e., venting), and thinking (i.e.,

ruminating) about frustrating or anger-provoking experiences fail to produce catharsis.

Thus, although the commonly held belief is that venting, ruminating, and acting out ag-

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[97] Kirsh, 170.
[98] Kirsh, 290.

gressively can release pent-up anger and aggressive feelings, the empirical data do not support this conclusion."[99]

Some work has been done toward developing theory that can explain the findings of the research on media violence.

Kirsh summarizes four types of desensitization, claiming that research has shown that violent media does result in increased likelihood of each of them. However, he points out that this research has been conducted on children, and that more research on desensitization effects on adolescents is needed. The four types are *psychological desensitization,* "lower levels of physiological arousal when viewing real-life aggression," *cognitive desensitization,* "more positive attitudes towards real-life aggression," *emotional desensitization,* "the blunting of emotional responses when viewing real-life acts of violence," and *behavioral desensitization*, "less likely to intervene in the face of real-world violence."[100]

Huesmann sees the effects of media violence in light of a "cumulative learning process" in which the media provides "aggressive scripts" which can be triggered later on in life, often through exposure to more violent content, which can then "stimulate aggressive behavior" While he recognizes the existence of "intervening variables" that may "mitigate or exacerbate" these effects, he notes that this process is, if unchecked, able to "build enduring schemas for aggressive behavior."[101]

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[99] Kirsh, 107-108.
[100] Kirsh, 222-224.
[101] Kundanis, 79. Citing L.R. Huesmann, *"*Psychological processes promoting the relation between exposure to media violence and aggressive behavior by the viewer," *Journal of Social Issues 42* (1986): 139.

In terms of variables that mitigate potential media effects, Kirsh cites studies in "contrast effects," which refers to "the inverse relationship between a judgment and a related stimulus." If these effects are in place, then depictions of violence in the media that receive disapproval from viewers may reduce, rather than increase, a young viewer's approval of real-life aggression. One such study shows that aggressive behavior among college students was greater for those viewing violence that was justified than for those viewing unjustified violence.[102] Similarly, he argues that aggressive behavior can be triggered not so much by high consumption of violence, but by high personal identification with violent characters.[103]

One of the greatest factors in the impact of media violence turns out to be, simply, whether it receives the moral approval of the viewer. "Active mediation," which Kirsh describes as "a means for communicating to youth what behavior is and is not acceptable,"[104] taken with the goal of having youth "perceive the putative positive consequences of using aggression negatively, thereby reducing the likelihood that such behavior will be imitated," has been found to actually reduce violent behavior. Kirsh notes that the positive effect of active mediation is stronger in older children, because of their increased abilities to control impulses.[105]

Sahara Byrne gives a cautionary note to those who would hope to mitigate the effects of media violence through active mediation, finding that media literacy interventions around violence that are one-sided (in her study involving viewing of violent media

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[102] Kirsh, 206.
[103] Kirsh, 218.
[104] Kirsh, 293.
[105] Kirsh, 293.

and hearing a presentation designed to educate on the dangers of media violence) can be counter-productive in the long term, producing increased risk of negative media effects. This was reversed when methods included a cognitive activity designed to increase "the level of cognitive activity required to process the information in the first place." Requiring an active cognitive response from those receiving a media intervention can "create stronger connections to multiple nodes in the brain, and is essentially equivalent to storing the information in more than one easily disposable place."[106] In interventions that included this cognitive component, the impact was positive, though still modest.

Because the research has regularly shown a negative behavioral effect from the unmediated viewing of media violence, and because co-viewing has been consistently shown to be counter-productive and active mediation, while potentially very positive, can also potentially worsen the effects, we are logically brought to consider "restrictive mediation" in which exposure to violent media consumption is restricted. Kirsh finds that "both experimental and correlational studies have demonstrated that restricting violent media consumption is associated with a reduction in aggressive behavior"[107] However, he argues that these positive effects are most likely when restrictions are moderate. "

> In contrast, youth experiencing either low or high levels of restrictive mediation tend to be more aggressive than other children. Furthermore, teens experiencing high levels of restrictive mediation report more negative attitudes towards their parents and a greater desire to see such media in comparison to teens experiencing moderate levels of restrictive mediation. And because these highly restricted youth cannot view/play/read violent media

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[106] Sahara Byrne, "Media Literacy Interventions: What makes them Boom or Boomerang?" *Communication Education 58*, no. 1 (January 2009): 5.
[107] Kirsh, 292.

at home, these teens are more likely to consume violent media with their friends and without their parent's knowledge.[108]

This is some referred to as the "Forbidden Fruit Hypothesis," which argues that parental media restrictions can backfire. Studies have shown that restrictions around violent and sexual media content can increase the likelihood that children will evaluate such media content positively and seek to view this content with peers. This negative effect also relates to some forms of active mediation. While younger children respond less positively toward media violence when adults make "negatively evaluative statements," 9-to-12-year-olds responded more positively. However, this backlash only occurred when negative statements were made authoritatively, rather than in question form.[109] This speaks to the diminishing returns of authoritative restrictions on use of media or authoritative pronouncements on the value of media as children move into adolescents.

Based upon this theoretical content, we have great reason to caution youth around the consumption of violent media, whether graphic or subtle, realistic or fantastical. Yet, the workshop created for this study attempts to communicate this caution in a "non-authoritative" manner. Rather than imposing restrictions, which is not even a practical possibility in this case, it invites self-restriction in the form of a Media Rule of Life. Likewise, rather than making authoritative statements about the value of violent content, we will invite youth to question violent scripts in light of Biblical truth, developing the skills

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[108] Kirsh, 292.

[109] Brad J. Bushman and Joanne Cantor, "Forbidden Fruit Hypothesis." Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, ed. *Encyclopedia of Children, Adolescents, and the Media vol.* 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 358-359. Citing A.I. Nathanson, & M. Yang, "The effects of mediation content and form on children's responses to violent television," *Human Communication Research 20 (2003):* 111-134 and A.I. Nathanson, "The unintended effects of parental mediation of television on adolescents," *Media Psychology 4 (2002):* 207-230.

to make their own judgments. This is designed to be a combination of both restrictive and active mediation resistant to the Forbidden Fruit effect.

Non-Pornographic Sexual Content

In addition to violent content, sexual content in the media, even when it is not pornographic, is a focus of significant restrictive mediation. Significant behavioral studies and developmental theory are relevant to this subject.

First, behavioral studies do show a link between significant exposure sexual content on television and the initiation of sexual intercourse; longitudinal studies showed that those with such exposure "were twice as likely to initiate sexual intercourse in the upcoming year. They also became sexually active, on average, six months earlier than their peers with low exposure to televised sexual content."[110]

Related to this, "data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health demonstrated that adolescents whose parents limited their TV viewing to less than two hours a day had about half the rate of sexual initiation as adolescents whose parents strongly disapproved of sex, but did not limit TV viewing, resulting in the adolescent watching more than two hours of TV a day."[111] This is significant, in that the variable impacting sexualized behavior is not in the values of the family, but in the actual quantity of exposure to media content.

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[110] Michael Rich, "Virtual Sexuality: The Influence of Entertainment Media on Sexual Attitudes and Behavior." In Jane D. Brown, ed., *Managing the Media Monster: The Influence of Media (From Television to Text Messages) on Teen Sexual Behavior and Attitudes* (Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008), 26.
[111] Rich, 28.

This increased likelihood of early sexual activity has a long-term component to it. Chapin cites longitudinal studies that show "a strong relationship between watching sexy TV in early adolescence and earlier initiation of sexual intercourse in middle and late adolescence," arguing that the sexual practices modeled in the media "provide models from whom beliefs and aptitudes are learned and actions are imitated."[112] Even when behavioral manifestation lags by several years, the impact upon one's sexual schema in early adolescence has continuing effect.

Schema theory states that the media is "a source for adolescents in developing schema in addition to their own feelings and experiences." Those with a degree of background knowledge and interest in sexuality but little experience use sexual media "to inform them and fill in information."[113] This becomes an issue when one has very little experience of their sexuality and has received limited information from his or her community; this person may use the media to fill in a significant amount of gaps of knowledge. Hence, sexualized media would have a disproportionate formative effect for adolescents who have not had time to grow in knowledge of their sexuality.[114]

The development of a sexual schema occurs largely through watching the sexual behaviors and attitudes of the adults within one's own community,[115] but when sexual content is regularly viewed or heard through popular electronic media, it plays a strong

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[112] John R. Chapin, "Adolescent Sex and the Mass Media: A Developmental Approach." *Adolescence 35*, no. 140 (Winter 2000): 804.

[113] Kundanis, 81-82.

[114] Enid Gruber and Joel W. Grube, "Adolescent sexuality and the media: a review of current knowledge and implications," *Western Journal of Medicine* (2000 Mar): 172(3), 210-214.

[115] John Dacey and Maureen Kenny, *Adolescent Development: Second Edition.* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1997), 296.

role in sexual formation. Cultural taboos around discussing sexual topics and the increasing independence of adolescence are both responsible for limiting the amount of sexual information being received from parents or other authoritative sources and, as a result, "teens are searching for non-parental information and television provides an anonymous, entertaining source that serves their information needs."[116] Hence, even while the behaviors of the people with whom adolescents are in living relationships are of more formative weight, a larger quantity of exposure to sexual content in popular media can make it ultimately more formative to social imaginary.

Cultivation theory argues that high usage of the media "may overwhelm the information [youth] receive from their real-world peers. As a result, media personalities may become 'superpeers,' engaging youths' aspirations, demonstrating how fictional teens think and act, and functioning as virtual role models for those who are figuring out who they are and how they should behave as sexual beings."[117] When the majority of sexual narratives to which one has been exposed mark the experience of "falling in love" with sexual intercourse, it is difficult not to find oneself experiencing an internal tension, emotionally celebrating such moments, while consciously asserting that the action is a grave sin. In addition to the moral tension, there is the danger of having one's sexual imagination formed by fiction, rather than by the behaviors of real people who need to deal with the long-term relational consequences of their actions.

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[116] Kundanis, 29.
[117] Rich, 20.

From within a Christian context, Brian Godawa argues effectively that inclusion of both violent and sexual content in film has appropriate and positive uses. He argues that the problem with this content is not so much the depiction of violent or sexual content itself, but the worldview, often nihilistic, behind its presentation.[118] He reviews the many and often graphic depictions of sex and violence in the texts of the Scriptures as examples, arguing that contextual factors create "the difference between moral *exhortation* and immortal *exploitation* of sin."[119] Intention to expose violent behavior to the light is moral, whereas intention to depict violence for the sake of enjoyment is immoral.[120] Appropriate depiction is careful, using "narrative summary" or other techniques "to avoid indulgence in the titillation of sin while addressing it honestly."[121] It is appropriate to show the negative consequences of sinful behavior, and harmful to portray such behavior as indifferent or justified.[122] Finally, the context of the presentation ought not glamorize evil or show it for cathartic enjoyment; such content can be appropriate within a context in which one is invited into redemption.[123] By this logic, which successfully spells out a distinction between the violent and sexualized content in the Scriptures and much of this content within popular media, it would appear that appropriate media depiction can bear similar fruit to a positive media intervention, inviting those who view this content to view it in an appropriate light and respond accordingly. Godawa's presentation does not, how-

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[118] Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom & Discernment,* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 33.
[119] Godawa, 49, emphasis original.
[120] Godawa, 49-51.
[121] Godawa, 50.
[122] Godawa, 52-54.
[123] Godawa, 54.

ever, develop on the distinction between the visual depiction of film media from the textual depiction of the Scriptures. One major distinction is that written literature requires the mind the form its own images, while film supplies those images itself. Thus, a younger reader with limited life experience might not have the imaginative resources to grasp the content being read, while a younger viewer receives and retains the images seen on screen. Thus, the ten-year-old who picks up Judges and reads scenes of sexual violence experiences that content with much less intensity than one who sees it take place on film, because rather than having the imagery deposited visually *into* the imagination, it must be supplied *from* the imagination.

While I agree with Godawa that sexualized content is not always inherently or universally detrimental, it is notable that he does not give much attention to developmental issues around appropriateness of viewership. His comments seem to be directed toward a generalized adult audience.

Beaumont exhorts all viewers of sexualized media to be "honest about motives. We should never use cultural relevancy as an excuse to give in to the flesh. We must know our limits and the areas in which we struggle, and make our choices accordingly."[124] When working with adolescents, their limits will be more restrictive than those of adults, even if their interest in such media is at its peak. Thus, it behooves parents and others who participate in adolescent formation to encourage significant caution around sexual content. This caution need not hinder youth from developing skills in in-

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[124] Beaumont, 156.

teraction with popular culture; it simply reduces the field of acceptable media with which

to practice those skills during adolescence.

Based on the behavioral data and the work of schema and cultivation theorists

whose theoretical positions fit the data, it is safe to argue that, while teaching adolescents,

a few points of action emerge which are in play in the workshop I have developed.

First, because the development of a healthy sexual schema requires that sexual

information and scripts be provided by those with whom youth are in community, it is

appropriate that this workshop include and invite discussion around sexual topics.

Second, because of the sensitive place in development shown above, great caution

is taken to avoid sexualized content that provides more information than is necessary, or

imagery and language that overstimulates the imagination.

Third, direct instruction about the impact of sexual content on one's imagination

is be given as students are invited to form a Media Rule of Life, and students will be en-

couraged to take this seriously as they shape their own boundaries.

Cognitive Readiness

While the above discussion on violence and sexuality comes out in favor of a

strong, though not absolute, measure of cultural abstinence among adolescents. However,

the advancing cognitive capacities of adolescents put them in a position where they are

are prepared to deal positively with a significant range of content, including ideas that are

challenging to their Christian faith. Before the development of the frontal lobe, children

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are not yet prepared to differentiate between reality and fantasy.[125] Likewise, when a child is not yet cognitively aware of the difference between advertisement and other programming, or is unable to recognize the intent to persuade in advertisements, he or she is particularly susceptible to manipulation. These capacities develop during childhood, the former around the age of five and the latter around the age of eight.[126] The Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood is a coalition seeking to develop public policy that will insulate children from such advertising media before they are cognitively ready to resist manipulation.[127] This is a strategy of age-based cultural abstinence, applied within a secular context.

By middle adolescence, while some of these strategies remain relevant, cognitive capacity has increased significantly. Unlike younger children, middle adolescents have generally developed the capacity to mentally stand apart from themselves and the media content they are receiving, deliberately evaluating it.[128]

Kevin Ochner has performed studies in which he finds that, while children (age 8-12) are less able to deliberately regulate their emotions, adolescents (age 13-17), are able to function at an adult level in this regard. His study involves top-down emotional regulation through reappraisal, that is, to deliberately alter the emotional impact of an external stimulus by reappraisal (i.e. giving attention to the indirect benefits of un otherwise un-

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[125] Gloria DeGaetano, "The Impact of Media Violence on Developing Minds and Hearts," in *Childhood Lost: How American Culture is Failing Our Kids*, ed. Sharna Oldman (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 99-102.

[126] Susan Linn, "The Commercialization of Childhood," in *Childhood Lost: How American Culture is Failing Our Kids.*, ed. Sharna Olfman (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 117.

[127] Linn, 117.

[128] James W. Vander Zanden, Revised by Thomas L. Crandall & Corinne Haines Crandell, *Human Development: Updated Seventh Edition*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 387-388.

fortunate situation). This deliberate reappraisal can be positive or negative.[129] Thus, adolescents are cognitively prepared to consciously work through media material that would otherwise be generative of unregulated negative emotion, or to resist manipulation of positive emotion (as in advertisement). Ochsner contrasts this with a "bottom-up" generation of an emotional response, which is more involuntary, not a result of conscious emotional control.[130]

Related to Ochsner's statements, Kirsh, citing studies of brain activity of youth viewing emotionally-laden drawings, finds that this imagery triggered activity in the limbic system, while later adolescents had increased activity in both the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex. Kirsh theorizes, "It may be that early adolescents are responding to emotionally laden situations with less prefrontal cortical activity, and thus are proportionally more emotion driven than older individuals."[131]

However, the development of skills and knowledge is not automatic and takes time and opportunities to practice the work of evaluation and decision, so that youth are not prepared to positively interact with much in the electronic media even if the cognitive "hardware" is in place.[132] When an adolescent is exposed to such content in isolation, the likelihood of negative formative impact is much greater than exposure that occurs in the

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[129] Kevin N. Ochsner, "How Thinking Controls Feeling: A Social Cognitive Neuroscience Approach." In *Social Neuroscience: Integrating Biological and Psychological Explanations of Social Behavior,* edited by Eddie Harmon-Jones and Piotr Winkielman. (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 122.

[130] Ochsner, 125.

[131] Kirsh, 258, citing D. Yurgelun-Todd, *Physical changes in adolescent brain may account for turbulent teen years, McLean Hospital study reveals.* Accessed December 1, 2002, http://www.mclean.harvard.edu/PublicAffairs/TurbulentTeens.htm.

[132] John W. Santrock, *Life-Span Development: Fifth Edition* (Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1995), 354-355.

context of a community of people who can aid an adolescent in thoughtful engagement, as discussed below. One partial application of cultural abstinence, thus, is to limit exposure to media content for which an adolescent is unprepared, either in terms of imagery, norms, or concepts, to contexts in which a larger community is present. That community could be as small as one parent.[133]

This approach invites youth to continue to develop their cognitive capacities without removing all boundaries. Jodi Gold gives a caution that may be particularly appropriate for parents who have a high level of confidence in their adolescents' character and are inviting them into greater levels of freedom. She argues that parentally-imposed media boundaries are important, regardless of how much trust parents may have for their children. "It takes guidance and experience to present, post, manage, and navigate technology."[134] Particularly, she notes that executive functioning is one of the last brain functions to develop, so planning and consequences around media boundaries need to be external until this is clearly in place. Otherwise, we are asking youth who are still developing their ability to make good judgement to establish boundaries that most adults find difficult to maintain.[135]

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[133] Gruber and Grube, 210-214. In a secular context, specifically around sexual content in media, viewing of this content is recommended to take place together with parents or other concerned adults, with screening software recommended as a means to limit unsupervised access.

[134] Jodi Gold, *Screen-Smart Parenting: How to Find Balance and Benefit in your Child's Use of Social Media, Apps, and Digital Devices* (New York, The Guilford Press, 2015), 97.

[135] Gold, 170-171.

Boundaries around Quantity of Media Consumption

While the above-related sections relate particularly to boundaries for adolescents around the content of media, quite a bit has been written to encourage the creation of boundaries around the quantity of media consumed as well. Positively stated, if media are consumed with appropriate moderation, one will have time and energy for other things that are needful and healthful.

Turnau develops several guidelines for adults creating boundaries around media usage, which require a certain degree of wisdom and self-knowledge. The first, in line with the discussion above, is to "cultivate wisdom by knowing where you are weak and likely to be tempted, and then avoid popular-cultural texts that would prey on those weaknesses."[136] The second is to avoid popular material that "is so sick and twisted that you would feel stained if you participated in it by watching, listening, or playing."[137] The third, however, involves what Turnau calls the "emotional price tag," and he counsels that one "understand the emotional baggage attached to a piece of popular culture,"[138] He notes that the emotional impact of some works of popular culture can linger for days, depending on one's predispositions, and notes that this can be true to a greater extent for younger people who have not yet developed the skills to deal with this sort of emotional material.[139] It is a question of whether one has the emotional bandwidth to process the content in question.

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[136] Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 100.
[137] Turnau, 101.
[138] Turnau, 102.
[139] Turnau, 103.

Potter argues that our minds respond to the overload of media messages by developing "automatic routines." "Our minds have developed routines that guide this filtering process very quickly and efficiently so we don't have to spend much, if any, mental effort… we load an automatic program into our mind that tells it what to look for and ignore the rest."[140] While this process has significant benefit in keeping us from being overwhelmed by the multiplicity of messages, Potter notices several negative effects. He points out that "increased exposure does not translate into increased learning," but, in fact, "It is likely that the more time people spend with the media in general, the less likely they are to learn from any one message. With so many messages and so many exposures, the value of any one message keeps getting reduced."[141] Thus, in a state of hyper-automaticity brought on by overexposure to media, "we may be missing a lot of messages that might be helpful or enjoyable to us. We might not have programmed all the triggers we need to help us get out of automatic processing when a potentially useful message comes our way."[142] Thus, there is potential benefit to creating spaces and times in which the flood of media messages is slowed and conscious attention can be given to that which is in front of us. By Potter's logic, less media exposure is likely to result in more positive interactions with the media. Thus, before attempting to build new skills around media interaction, it is advisable develop boundaries around the quantity of media messages being received; if these messages can be isolated and given full attention, this process has a better chance at bearing positive fruit.

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[140] Potter, 8.
[141] Potter, 9.
[142] Potter, 9.

In the same vein, Turnau speaks of the wisdom of periods of temporary withdrawal from the continual flow of media, emphasizing that this strategy is a temporary one undergone "with a view to reentering the mediascape with intentionality, with a renewed perspective and focus. We back off so we can reengage with a fresh wisdom."[143]

Gold encourages moderate use of screen time, both for academic purposes and to ensure sufficient rest. High screen time during weekdays (not weekends) has been shown to be "a risk factor for poor school performance."[144] The reasons for this are not clearly demonstrated, but it is likely connected to decreased productivity through multitasking and to loss of sleep through evening media use.[145] One practical piece of advice that Gold repeats several times is that adults, youth, and children do not bring their devices to bed.[146]

Boundaries around media usage can also protect emotional health. Dr. Archibald Hart and Dr. Sylvia Hart Freid assert that internet behaviors, including gambling, gaming, and use of Facebook, have a drug-like impact. They flood the brain's pleasure center, essentially desensitizing it to normal pleasures. This has an addictive component and can "rob you of the simple joys of life."[147]

Another implication of the schema theory discussed above is that limiting the quantity of media consumption balance media voices with those of other people with

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[143] Turnau, 163.
[144] Gold, 46.
[145] Gold, 46.
[146] Gold, 39, 84, 170.
[147] Dr. Archibald D. Hart and Dr. Sylvia Hard Frejd, *The Digital Invasion: How Technology is Shaping You and Your Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 60. Cited in Gary Chapman and Arlene Pellicane, *Growing up Social: Raising Relational Kids in a Screen-Driven World* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2014), 129.

whom one is in relationship (i.e. parents, friends, teachers, church), with the Scriptures, and with other input. Simply put, within proper limits, the voices present in the media do not have a disproportionate role in one's formation.

Limitations of Cultural Abstinence

As development moves forward and one's cognitive capacities and skills, as well as one's social imaginary, continues to develop, cultural abstinence will carry less weight. There is a tension involved in its use with adolescents that make universal rules difficult; while the critical and evaluative capacities are exercised by exposure to a diversity of content, that content's formative power transcends the critical centers of the brain and forms the social imaginary. Thus, when the binary question, "Is it a good idea to be exposed to this sort of content?" is largely dependent on whether the evaluative skills are in place or if the exposure is taking place within a community that can help to develop those skills, the answer to questions of quantity, "How much exposure to this content is appropriate?" is dependent upon other factors, including the intensity of the content, how many other "real" inputs one's imagination is receiving, how well-developed one's social imaginary has already become, etc.

As a strategic category, cultural abstinence does not stand alone, because it is virtually impossible to "opt out" completely from all interactions with popular culture; it is ubiquitous. Furthermore, since popular media create a common set of images and language even for interactions between young children, the negative social impact of total withdrawal would be significant. While the imposition of limitations in terms of quantity

and content of popular media exposure has an ongoing place, albeit one that decreases as development moves forward, the strategic category of cultural abstinence must be supplemented with those geared toward forming the exposure that does take place to be positively formative.

Category 2: Cultural Conversation- The Development of Skills

I use the term "cultural conversation," to refer to various strategies through which the Christian community deliberately and knowingly engages with the content of popular electronic media. Just as a conversation could go many ways, so can these strategies. Some are defensive or resistive. Some involve affirmation, complete or partial, and constructive reinterpretation of media content. The impact of any particular cultural artifact is shaped to a significant degree by the community in which it is received.

Faith Development Theory

Faith development theory suggests that high school is an ideal time to focus on cultural conversation in the context of Christian community. These years represent a sensitive, and possibly short-lived, period when the cognitive capacity for critical thinking around abstract principles is in place, and when the faith developmental task is to bring the various elements of one's beliefs and perspectives into conformity with those of other people with whom one is in relationship. This is Fowler's Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith development, a stage often entered during adolescence. In this stage, the faith of one's community tends to be in a place of central importance, and it is not uncommon to

see an adolescent finding a way to hold together contradictory views to achieve con-

formity.[148] If an adolescent in this phase of faith development understands himself to be-

long to a faith community, it is at this stage natural to try to think about and view reality

in a manner appropriate to a member of that community. The larger risk to Christian for-

mation in this moment does not come from exposure to a disparity of ideas, but the ten-

sion of trying to conform to the diverse communities to which one belongs, particularly if

one's sense of belonging in the Christian community has been weakened for any

reason.[149]

The search for conformity proper to Synthetic-Conventional faith is, particularly

during adolescence, healthy and appropriate. The language through which we struggle

make sense of reality is first developed in community with others, before one can begin

personally appropriating and examining that perspective. In this sense, indoctrination is

universal, and is a necessary preparation before one can enter an Individuative-Reflective

stage of faith development. If Christian communities default on their influence in this

stage, some other relationship will fill the vacuum.[150]

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[148] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning.* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 172-173.

[149] Stark and Bainbridge concluded "that the need to belong may be a stronger driver in religious participation than religious ideology. For example, they found that movement into and out of religious groups depends more on social bonds than ideological belief." See Janice L. Templeton, and Jacquelynne S. Eccles, "The Relation Between Spiritual Development and Identity Processes," in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, edited by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Pamela Ebstyne King, Linda Wagener, & Peter L. Benson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 257. Quoting R. Stark & W.S. Bainbridge, *The future of religion: Secularization, revival, and cult formation (*Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

[150] Vander Zanden et al., 402. In a discussion around community-oriented rites of passage, Vander Zanden et al. describe youth sexual and drug activity as acts of "self-initiation" that occur in the absence of an adult community.

Middle adolescence represents a unique opportunity for deliberate cultural con-

versation to take place within the Christian community in a time while the adolescent's

identity is still strongly tethered to that of the Church community. This conversation is a

context in which the norms of the Gospel can be applied to a broad range of questions,

experiences, and truth claims. It can also serve as a preparation for the often difficult

movement toward Fowler's Individuative-Reflective stage of faith, which may occur in

early adulthood. This movement is often triggered by the separation from home, family,

and community that occurs when one leaves home for college, work, or long-term

travel.[151] The increasingly personal work of meaning-making is aided by what has come

before, and by whatever skills in listening and critical reflection have been built. Ideally,

deliberate cultural conversation will reduce the potential disillusionment of finding that

one's upbringing within a Christian community has not provided the language, cate-

gories, or skills necessary to interact with a broader world of images and ideas.

It is appropriate to note here that, while a full movement into Fowler's Individua-

tive-Reflective stage of faith is unlikely for middle adolescents, it is much more likely

that the transition toward this sort of thinking may begin in this phase and occur over

several years. Westerhoff names this transition "searching faith," a necessary step be-

tween "affiliative faith" and "owned faith."[152] This process of searching can express itself

in many ways, including doubt or rapid alteration between perspectives.[153] The church's

response to doubt and questioning can often result in alienation from the church commu-

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[151] Fowler, 178-179.

[152] John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Revised Edition. (Harrisburg, PA: More-house Publishing, 2000), 93.

[153] Westerhoff, 94.

nity. If there is no legitimate place in community for the expression of such doubts, then the person experiencing that doubt may be forced into the decision of either repressing them, or concluding that they do not truly belong to their faith community, and that intellectual honesty and continued membership in a Christian community are mutually exclusive. Either the conversation happens in the context of a different community that will not be supportive to one's faith formation, or the adolescent will disengage from cultural conversation to avoid tension.

The workshop that I have developed focuses on five particular skills in cultural conversation: (1) listening to understand, (2) receiving a correction, (3) detecting hidden narratives, (4) recognizing and responding to persuasive intent, (5) finding common ground. Much of the literature that informs Christian cultural conversation relates to one or more of these skills. Each of these is now treated in order.

Listening to Understand

The skill of listening in the context of popular media is an application of the biblical call to humility and love of neighbor. Adam and Missy Andrews, teaching a similar skill-set for literature analysis, argue that a Christian reading of a text involves "reading carefully enough, reading closely enough, that we understand the author's worldview when we read, paying attention so that we understand him on his own terms. And we call that a Christian reading because Christianity enjoins us to be (a) quick to hear and slow to

speak and (b) not to bear false witness."[154] Once one understands the position of the author, he or she is in a place to "step back and compare the truth as he has expressed it with the truth as you know it."[155] However, such analysis can only charitably be done once understanding has been achieved. This approach to media assumes that one see the cultural artifact in a personal light. Rather than being part of a homogenous and impersonal phenomenon called "the media," each work of cultural creation is the work of an individual person or group of people. Though this is in one sense obvious, the screen often removes the human cultural agent either from sight or at least from personal contact, making it possible to suspend behavioral rules that may be assumed in other more personal interaction.

Stout observes three faulty approaches to listening that often emerge as obstacles to media literacy within religious settings. "Secondary analysis" refers to the tendency of evaluating media based on somebody else's statements. "Text simplification" refers to one-dimensional analysis of content (often morality). *Rule extension* is the tendency of creating overly simplistic guidelines around media usage without flexibility.[156] This is a learned behavior common, but not universal, among students raised in a distinctly religious context, which provides significant barriers to conversation or true understanding.

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[154] Adam and Missy Andrews,"Your Assignment: Reading with Integrity." *Worldview Detective: A Socratic Method for Investigating Great Books.* Course Lecture on CD (Rice, WA: Center for Lit, 2015).
[155] Andrews, "Your Assignment: Reading with Integrity."
[156] Stephen T. Yeagley, *Teaching Media Literacy as a Pastoral Skill For Seventh-Day Adventist Seminary Students. (*Andrews University, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. D.Min Thesis, 2015), 53. *Citing* D.A. Stout, "Religious media literacy: Toward a research agenda." *Journal of Media & Religion* 1, no.1 (2002): 49.

If one is working off of a second-hand, one-dimensional caricature of culture, the likelihood of successful and missional engagement with that culture is quite low.

Yeager, in his summary of Christian approaches to popular media, lists a "dialogical approach," in which Christians use the media as a point of contact with the broader culture for "collaborative meaning-making."[157] Essentially, Christians listen carefully to the media to tap into the discussion already taking place, and then seek to join into that discussion appropriately. His concern is that "the normative approach to the Scriptures may be lost and conversations may lapse into relative discourse,"[158] as one is now taking talking points from the various voices in popular culture. Far from discouraging this approach, he argues that this it can only work when one has "a theological anchor cast into the deep, even as there is openness to new insights."[159]

Similarly, Grant Horner argues that, because "the vast majority of our conscious experience is visual experience… film is the perfect medium for capturing what it means to be human… So whatever else film is, it is not of no importance. It is an extraordinarily human endeavor and a richly human experience."[160] For Horner, because film shows our humanness so clearly, it shows forth the truth of God's Word, in revealing both the ongoing knowledge of God that is essential to humanity and our fallen state.[161] Thus, interaction with film provides an opportunity "to learn that Scripture is meant to be used—*to be*

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[157] D.M. Yeager, "The Social Self in the Pilgrim Church." In Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 56.

[158] Yeager, 57.

[159] Yeager, 57.

[160] Grant Horner, *Meaning at the Movies: Becoming a Discerning Viewer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 31.

[161] Horner, 29.

active agent of critique— in the believer's life."[162] Horner draws attention to the skill of discernment, developed through intimate knowledge of the Scriptures. The value of film for Horner is that it gives us a clear enough expression of humanity to then open up to the scrutiny of Scripture.

While Andrews speaks of the need to listen and understand first, then evaluate, Turnau questions whether it is possible for anybody "to suspend their moral and theological judgments while watching a movie or listening to a song, to allow it so speak in its own voice."[163] While it might make logical sense to speak of listening to understand before responding critically, these are not necessarily chronologically separated, and the attempt to turn off one's critical capacities while listening is likely to be unhelpful.

The skill of listening in order to understand, with humility and love, is not being taught in this workshop as a new skill. Rather, it is a life skill highly valued in many contexts that can be under-applied in interactions with popular media, particularly among Christians. This is the basic skill that undergirds those following.

Receiving a Correction

Paired with the skill of listening to understand, the skill of receiving a correction is also often under-applied in media interactions. If one's self-understanding is that of a consumer of media, then it is up to the consumer to critique and evaluate the media product. However, if one is engaging in cultural conversation and practicing the skill of listen-

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162 Horner, 30, emphasis original.
163 Turnau, 181.

ing to understand what one's neighbor is saying through his or her media creation, then it is necessary to enter the conversation not only prepared to critique, but to receive a correction.

Iaquinta and Keeler argue that the popular media are distinctly positioned to be an aid to Christian spirituality, as the media can connect very strongly with our emotions in areas where, otherwise, Christians often overlook "the affective qualities of their faith experience."[164] When a media product stirs emotive response of grief over evil, particularly an evil in which we somehow participate, that affective response can be fruitfully turned into repentance, with a degree of awareness and fervor that may have otherwise not existed.

Barsotti and Johnston add a pragmatic reason for connecting film to faith: retention. Those theologies that are presented and recognized in the media of film are highly likely to be retained to a high degree.[165] They recognize that, while much of the church's response to film has focused either on caution or deliberate dialogue with film,[166] new approaches are merging. "Appropriation" is the phenomenon of having our vision expanded through film, which provides "new vistas by which to understand truth, beauty, and goodness."[167] Sacramental traditions can also recognize "all of life, including the movies" as "an occasion of divine encounter. As artist, the filmmaker can disclose God's

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[164] Stephanie Iaquinto & John Keeler, "Faith-based media literacy education: A Look at the Past with an Eye toward the future." *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 4, no. 1 *(2012):* 23.
[165] Catherine M. Barsotti & Robert K. Johnston, *Finding God in the Movies: 33 Films of Reel Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBook, 2004), 12.
[166] Barsotti & Johnston, 20.
[167] Barsotti & Johnston, 21.

presence as God chooses to speak through and within his creature's creations."[168] Partial-

ly for this reason, Barsotti and Johnston are cautious about watching film in the "dual-

listening mode" discussed above, in which one is "listening for the message of the movie

and then comparing and contrasting it with the message of the Word of God."[169] This ap-

proach does not take seriously the artistic nature of the medium. Thus, while supporting

critical and thoughtful discussion of film, this "must follow not precede, the enjoyment of

experiencing a well-told story."[170] If artistic enjoyment is indeed a potential context for

divine encounter, the dissection that can take place from more analytical approaches is

likely to prevent such enjoyment from taking place.

Turnau has great misgivings about this language of divine encounter, pointing out

that "it is a dangerous oversimplification to simply *assume* that the messages delivered by

popular culture are God's messages…we can not depend on popular culture for a reliable

access to the truth."[171] So, if God does speak to us through the popular culture, the writ-

ten text of Scripture functions as "a guide to sort out the messages we receive…a sieve

through which we can sift what the culture gives us."[172] While Turnau is open to divine

encounter occurring through popular cultural materials, this encounter is in no way to be

held in parallel to Biblical revelation. Rather, cultural material can be a tool through

which God's Spirit may illuminate, illustrate, and affectively communicate truth, but

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[168] Barsotti & Johnston, 21.
[169] Barsotti & Johnston, 25.
[170] Barsotti & Johnston, 26.
[171] Turnau, 185, emphasis original.
[172] Turnau, 185.

these cultural messages do not stand on their own authority; that which is received must be weighed in light of and filtered through the trustworthy revelation of the Scriptures.

The difficulty is that much of the popular media is produced from a perspective indifferent, critical, or hostile to the Christian faith, or at least to the Church. While these sources are likely to contain elements that are sorted out through the "sieve" of Biblical revelation, these are also the sources that are the most likely to voice perspectives that are corrective to sinful behavior or faulty thinking of which the Church corporately, or her members individually, may be guilty. If the messages themselves can be sorted out from one another, it may be found that, amidst a variety of critiques that are sifted out, one or more are valid and instructive.

Detweiler and Taylor see popular culture as "a refreshing, alternative route to a Jesus who for many has been domesticated, declawed, and kept under wraps. As the Christian church has often adopted the role of moral policeman, pop culture has assumed the role of spiritual revolutionary, subverting and frustrating those religious authorities who desperately cling to black-and-white answers in an increasingly gray world."[173] While these words reflect very little respect for the church's historic role in teaching bib-lical morality and restraining false teaching, it does hold true with the fact that prophetic voices, challenging sinful patterns that have become the status quo within the life of the Church or the broader culture, often speak from the fringes of institutional structures or from outside them. Popular media is certainly a context where this prophetic, outsider perspective can be expressed. We must be prepared to hear and test these voices, seeking

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[173] Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 9.

to discern which of them are speaking in agreement with God's Word, and to resist the urge to ignore a valid critique because it comes from an unexpected source.

Detecting Hidden Narratives

"Hidden narratives" refer to the larger stories, often unspoken within a cultural item, that stand behind that cultural content. The cultural item does not stand in isolation, but only makes sense once one has adopted, even if only for the purposes of entering into a story, a larger body of assumptions. Multiple terms, such as contestation, worldview analysis, and meta-narrative are all used in reference to this particular skill.

"Contestation" is used to describe conversations, often initiated by adults, in which young people are invited to use their critical capacities to question media content being presented. This may involve questioning of specific claims and views being advanced, but also the logic of the narratives and images. Simply by questioning these narratives, we open up to the mind and imagination the possibility that other choices, actions, or events could or even should have occurred. This invitation to engage the critical and evaluative capacities draws the viewer out of the passive role into that of deliberate meaning-making.[174] Contestation can have the negative purpose of limiting or countering the unhealthy formative power of the popular media. Positively, the critical engagement can actually result in the conscious affirmation of positive norms counter to those being presented in the cultural material being contested.

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[174] This language and concept is developed in Katherine Turpin, "Princess Dreams: Children's Spiritual Formation in Consumer Culture." *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World,* ed. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Almeda M. Wright (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008), 58-59.

Andrews, in his "Worldview Detective" curriculum, uses a Socratic method for worldview analysis, in which 74 questions in 13 categories are asked of any piece of literature to determine the worldview of the author. There are two main categories of questions; while some are put toward the literature itself, others require research into the author's life, beliefs, broader work, and setting. Two questions are repeated regularly. "Do the story's answers to these questions tell the truth as THE AUTHOR saw it?" is a question that is seeking for internal consistency and honesty within the author's frame of reference. Meanwhile, "Do the story's answers to these questions tell the truth as YOU see it?" is asked to allow the reader to compare the worldview within which the story is written with a biblical worldview.[175] For Andrews, the role of direct Christian formation, the "daily line-by-line, precept-upon-precept inculcation of the things Jesus taught" is distinct from the work of "exposing [children and youth] to various worldviews that are not in keeping with Christianity and Christian doctrine so as to equip them to live in a world that is fallen."[176] While honoring this distinction, Andrews does seem to assume an artificial divide between Christian formation, which deals specifically with the teachings of Jesus, and exposure to, analysis of, and response to various worldviews in light of that teaching. On the face of it, Andrews' comments do not leave room for the possibility that interaction with cultural texts may be the very context in which Christians search the Scriptures to discover the application of "the things Jesus taught" to the doctrinal, ethical, and worldview questions of the moment.

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[175] Andrews, 8-11.

[176] Andrews, Recorded Video Lecture. "Your Assignment: Reading with Integrity."

Beaumont distinguishes between the worldview and the message of a film, warning that one need be careful about confusing the two.[177] As an example, he points to sexual content in romantic films. "Because many viewers see sex as the expression of romantic love, sex has become a sort of archetypical action to portray romantic love on the big screen."[178] Thus, while the sexual content stems from the worldview behind the film, this does not mean that the movie's main message is sexual. This can be a distraction from discerning the actual message of the film. However, it should be noted that these sexual scripts are continuing to have a formative impact, even if they are in many ways incidental to the theme of the film.

Horner, responding to Christian enthusiasm for films like *The Matrix*, asserts that Christian imagery and concepts can be used in a film that is decisively not Christian. His concern is that such imagery invites Christians to respond enthusiastically to content, not aware that in receiving that content, it is possible buy into "subtle philosophies and worldview positions that could undermine your faith."[179] He is not so much concerned about exposure to different worldviews, as about uncritical acceptance of content given without discerning the worldview implications. In fact, he argues that "we should walk away—we *can* walk away—stronger for having been exposed to error, *and exposing it as error.*"[180] For Horner, it is up to the Christian viewer to "think about what we see and hear, look for philosophical positions, analyze worldview issues, and finally make a

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[177] Beaumont, 60-61.
[178] Beaumont, 62.
[179] Horner, 56.
[180] Horner, 56, emphasis original.

sound judgment based on careful, critical comparison to what God says about the central issues of human experience."[181]

Kubey reports that the United States has been slow, among nations, to develop media literacy education, theorizing that the United States has less motivation, being itself a great exporter of media products. Whereas other countries desire to "help youth perceive that the values promulgated in the U.S. and other countries' media products are not necessarily their own,"[182] the United States "does not have that impetus of the threat of foreign media because there are few foreign media in the United States."[183] By this logic, it follows that a community within the United States that has a unique and often minority perspective on cultural matters, like the evangelical Christian community, would give special emphasis to the work of media literacy, leading the way in the work of recognizing the larger narratives and worldviews being expressed.

Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent

Literature around media content created with persuasive intent includes two main kinds of persuasion. The first is advertisement, which seeks to persuade somebody to purchase a particular product. The second is ideological persuasion, designed to persuade the viewer to adopt certain views or attitudes.

Potter contends that advertising does much of its work on the level of the subconscious. While viewers are in a state of automatic processing, they do not pay conscious

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[181] Horner, 95.

[182] Kundanis, 129. Citing R. Kubey, "Obstacles to the development of media education in the United States." *Journal of Communication* 48 (1998): 63.

[183] Kundanis, 129.

attention to all of the advertisements with which they are surrounded and therefore have no opportunity to analyze or evaluate these messages. This increases the persuasive effectiveness of the message, because the content of these advertisements is planted in the subconscious without any analytic filtering, "where they gradually shape our definitions for attractiveness, sex appeal, relationships, cleanliness, health, success, hunger, body shape, problems, and happiness…and profoundly shape the way we think about ourselves and the world."[184]

Adolescent viewers are generally in a position, cognitively, to distinguish between commercial and program content. Kundanis states, "Although children between 7 and 9 years of age may understand that the intent of the commercial is to persuade them to buy a product, children that age do not understand the techniques used by the advertisers until they are teens: 'By adolescence, children have at their disposal more of the cognitive tools necessary to help them distinguish program and commercial content, evaluate commercial messages, and take charge of the influence commercials will have on their consumer behavior.'"[185]

However, Potter states that, while "It is widely assumed that helping children understand the nature of advertising makes them less susceptible to advertising effects. However, empirical research does not provide convincing evidence for this view. Because so much of advertising is focused on manipulating emotions, the more we understand about the emotional development of people, the better we can help them to cope with this

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[184] Potter, 247-248.
[185] Kundanis quoting Doubleday, C.N., & Droege, K.L. "Cognitive developmental influences on children's understanding of television." In G.L. Berry & J.K. Asamen (Eds.), *Children and television, images in a changing sociocultural world (*Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 31-32.

type of message."[186] From this research, it becomes clear that simply recognizing the intention to persuade is not sufficient; one much question the scripts and images from which advertisements invite viewers to see the world.

Twitchell argues that, while advertisement presents images of celebrities using certain products, the imagination does far more work than the advertisement itself . The imagination closes the logical loop by causing the consumer to see himself or herself as "somehow smarter, sexier, or both… We dupe ourselves into believing we don't like to be deceived," but advertising works in part because, through it, we can address our "desperate need to be noticed."[187] Understanding and responding to persuasive intention in advertising requires not only that the viewer recognize the claims that are being made about the product, but the unmet needs, both real and imagined, on which the advertisement is predicated.

Detweiler and Taylor contend that advertisement has moved into the realm traditionally occupied by religion and philosophy, in that it seeks to answer the question, "What is it to be fully human?"[188] It presents images of the abundant life and inserts the products being advertised into those images, either as causally linked to the attainment of that life, or as essentially or at least accidentally connected the enjoyment of the same. To respond rightly to advertisement, the Christian must recognize that he is dealing with a primarily eschatological challenge.

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[186] Potter, 78.

[187] Detweiler and Taylor, 82-82, citing James Twitchell, *Lead Us into Temptation*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999),19-20.

[188] Detweiler and Taylor, 84.

Direct attempts at ideological persuasion through media, if detected, can often backfire, although such propaganda can have the function of uniting and sustaining a community of people already predisposed to accept the content. Beaumont points out that messages that are clearly works of propaganda are "only entertaining to those who already agree with the movie's message,"[189] citing examples on both the right and the left, politically. Thus, "storytelling techniques that communicate indirectly are more likely to capture the imagination of an audience and influence its ways of thinking."[190]

Inoculation theory is invoked in efforts to prepare students to recognize and weigh persuasive messages. This theory, developing since the 1960s, is based upon the premise that one can be inoculated against persuasive attempts in a manner comparable to inoculation against viruses. This resistance is generated by providing the recipient of a message with two key elements. The first is "threat", or the "recognition by message recipients that their existing position on an issue is vulnerable", which is often elicited by directly warning the recipient of precisely what a cultural object is designed to persuade somebody of. This recognition "functions as a motivating force for a protective response."[191] The second element of inoculation is "refutational preemption," which often "is characterized by the raising and refuting of counterarguments (i.e., challenges to an existing position.)"[192] Together, these two ingredients assist the one receiving a persuasive message

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[189] Beaumont, 33.

[190] Beaumont, 33.

[191] Josh Compton, Ben Jackson, and James A. Dimmock, "Persuading Others to Avoid Persuasion: Inoculation Theory and Resistant Health Attitudes." *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, no. 122 (February 2016): accessed April 20, 2017. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4746429/.

[192] Compton.

in the work of recognizing the persuasive intention and critically engaging with it. Interestingly, inoculation messages are being shown to provide "umbrella protection" against subsequent persuasive attempts, so that somebody who has been inoculated to defend themselves from one form of persuasion has a greater resistance against persuasive arguments for which one has not been specifically prepared.[193]

Cultural inoculation bears promise as a strategy to prepare young people for interaction with new ideas and worldviews which will run counter to those of the Christian faith, preparing them for initial engagement with these elements in the popular media or other contexts. The creation of a sense of "threat" is particularly necessary in this context, as much persuasive content is not advertising itself as persuasion, but as entertainment. Once the critical capacities have been engaged, the level of passive and unintentional formation will be significantly decreased.

While inoculation messages are likely to be effective with a young child when applied to a specific and concrete form of persuasion, the development of "umbrella protection" is likely to be significantly increased among middle adolescents. During this phase, youth develop abilities for increased "abstractness" in which they are able to "move back and forth between the concrete and the abstract."[194] This ability, usually not developed by early adolescents, makes it possible to derive a broader principle from inoculation that takes place in one context, successfully reapplying it in another context. For example, if one is looking at an advertisement that implies that a particular brand of

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[193] Compton.
[194] Vander Zanden et al., 394.

deodorant will bring instant happiness through sexual fulfillment, one is able not only to examine this particular claim, but to examine the unspoken assumptions that (a) a consumable product can deliver sexual fulfillment and that (b) sexual fulfillment can be equated with the "good life", and to recognize those same assumptions present both in an advertisement which promotes a soft drink through the same methodology, or in a popular song which places sexual fulfillment in a position of ultimacy. Because of abstractness, inoculation among middle adolescents helps to create an ever-thickening "umbrella" of associations that provide protection against attempts to persuade. This is an opportunity for new avenues in cultural formation, and a capacity that must be developed intentionally.

Meta-analysis of quantitative studies of media interventions shows that structured interventions do have a moderate and positive role in developing knowledge, belief in the influence exerted by media, realism, criticism, understanding of persuasive intent, attitudes, and behaviors. Longer interventions with more sessions were shown to have greater impact, while interventions with a larger number of components "such as critical analysis of media clips in addition to student activities as well as hands-on media production assignments" had a smaller effect size.[195]

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[195] Erica Sharrer and Srividya Ramasubramanian, "Intervening in the Media'a Influence on Stereotypes of Race and Ethnicity: The Role of Media Literacy Education". *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 1 (2015): 173-174. Citing S.H. Jong, J. Cho, and Y. Huang, "Media literacy interventions: A meta analytic review." *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 454-472.

Finding Common Ground

Cultural conversation involves a strong degree of listening. Popular culture presents us with an ongoing dialogue in which questions about what is true, good, right, and normal are being raised and answered, either consciously or unconsciously. When we enter into this conversation we can respond as we would to any conversation partner—listening closely to better understand the speaker, affirming or disagreeing in whole or in part, offering an alternate answer to a question or conundrum being posed, etc. This leaves us with the freedom, like St. Paul in Athens[196], to hear pagan philosophers and both agree with and redirect them at the same time. By entering into cultural conversation, we have an opportunity to witness to the gospel within the context of an ongoing dialogue. Practice in appropriate affirmation, partial-affirmation, or redirection of cultural content gives Christians opportunity to find common ground in this ongoing conversation.

The Christian community, approaching a text with the distinctive perspective formed by the Gospel, is likely to find significant points of resonance with some cultural material. Its perspective may result in new meaning emerging out of that artifact, not originally intended by its creator. One recent example can be seen in the response of pro-Life Christians to the book and, more recently, the film adaptation of Dr. Seuss' *Horton Hears a Who[197]*. Though Theodor Seuss Geisel and his widow have consistently resisted its application to the pro-Life cause,[198] Christians have seen the repeated line, "A person's

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[196] Acts17:28.

[197] Dr. Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who*. (New York: Random House, 1954).

[198] Marcus Baram, "Horton's Who: The Unborn?" *ABC News* (March 17, 2008), accessed April 20, 2017. http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/story?id=4454256&page=1.

a person, no matter how small", as a brilliant insight fully applicable to the unborn, whether the author intended it to be taken this way or not, and therefore use this line to advance the belief that unborn children are true persons and that a community of people must arise to protect them. This is not misuse or unfair manipulation of this material; it rather treats the cultural artifact not as a completed work with a fixed value, but as a conversation partner with an ongoing life of its own, from which we can find new meaning and in conversation with which the community receiving it can add its own insights.

Dana Lemish sums up the general tenor of media literacy today, in which there is a movement away from a view of children and youth as passive recipients, to one in which they have an active and deliberate role in both the selection of media which they will consume, the meaning they will make from it, and, indeed, media productions, in dialogue with teachers and adult socializers. "Teachers and pupils are assumed to be involved in a complicated process of negotiation that takes place, continuously, between audiences and texts, a process characterized by the possibility that multiple readings and interpretations exist for each and every text and that actively producing media messages can serve a variety of purposes."[199] The power of the strategy of finding common ground is in the real possibility of finding a focal point for mutual understanding and appreciation in a media product, from which one can invite one's neighbor to explore meanings and implications that have not yet been explored.

Roy Anker takes a positive approach to film. After seeking to understand the experience of a film itself, he seeks "to discover with what religious categories that 'lived

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[199] Lemish, 199.

experience' might fit."[200] In so doing, he is doing the work of meaning-making, in which some commonly received element of the film, perhaps an insight, a desire, or a response to certain circumstances, creates common ground for Christian reflection. His review of films falls explicitly under various categories. Tales of darkness are films that "travel a spiritual and moral landscape empties of any shred of the divine, where God is abscondi-tus, absentia, gone, dead, whatever," a view of the human condition that "restates the Christian doctrine of the Fall—that humankind is born into a perilous life that itself ends in death, is disposed to do evil, and throughout is pretty thoroughly lost."[201] His second category of films emphasize the possibility of redemption, surprising and unmerited, for those in dark circumstances. Anker's examples all come from specifically, albeit not ex-plicitly, Christian perspectives.[202] Thus, the work of finding common ground was done in these instances by filmmakers, rather than Christian viewers, although Christian viewers are able to find in them points of common resonance with those outside of the Christian community. Other films, such as *Star Wars* or *Superman,* which he calls "fables of light," stories in which miraculous, transcendent, or superhuman forces enter the story to "trans-figure the reality of the mostly human characters."[203] The common ground in these cases involves the knowledge that the challenges that face us "will take Light from beyond to cure."[204] His fourth category of films are those in which characters experience some vari-ety of redemption and respond with gratitude, thus opening viewers up to recognize "the

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[200] Roy Anker, *Catching Light: Looking for God in the Movies*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publish Co, 2004), 12.
[201] Anker, 19.
[202] Anker, 119-123.
[203] Anker, 215.
[204] Anker, 219.

unimaginable beauty of a world cast into being by the exultant love of God."[205] The potential benefit of Anker's approach is that he gives attention to points of resonance between the gospel story and the experiences, desires, and imagination of most movie viewers. However, the inherent danger is of drawing the points of connection too far, until Christian categories themselves are adjusted to make room for the content of the media. This sort of approach stands to have the greatest benefit from one who has also developed skills in detecting hidden narratives and attempts to persuade.

Turnau, in his characteristic caution, observes "a profound connection between the moments of grace and the lies of idolatry in a popular-cultural text."[206] This creates a danger that a lie may be so closely connected to a truth that, having already noted a point of common ground, one might uncritically accept that which is antithetical to the Christian faith. However, if one is in a position to discern the difference, the point of common ground might be a good starting place for a productive conversation about the untrue or idolatrous content offered alongside it. For Turnau, "a Christian reading of popular culture is completed" not by making a necessary negative critique, but "by showing the relevance of the gospel and the perspective that it alone reveals. In other words, one must seek to show how a biblical perspective responds to popular culture by providing answers and meanings to the deep questions raised by the popular-cultural text—answers that the controlling idolatry of the text cannot provide."[207] In this approach, common ground and critique come together in relevant application of the Gospel.

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[205] Anker, 317.
[206] Turnau, 235.
[207] Turnau, 241.

Limitations of Cultural Conversation

One of the main limitations to the strategies of directing the formative impact of popular cultural content through cultural conversation is that so much of the formation occurring is subtle. One can only converse with aspects of culture about which one has become conscious. If a perspective being shown forth through the popular media is so unremarkable within our culture that it goes unnoticed, it will not be critically engaged, even though our consumption the that popular good may reinforce that perspective. For example, it is fully possible that a Christian community in the United States could respond to magical elements in a film like Disney's *Aladdin* while being completely unaware of the anti-traditionalism and individualism that pervade it.

Additionally, much of the formative power of popular culture does not come through direct assertion, but by supplying the mind with a set of images which create unexamined norms. For example, staying with *Aladdin*, Disney's choice to give the main characters American accents, while giving Middle Eastern accents and features to those characters pictured as stupid or evil, builds up racial stereotypes at the level of the imagination.[208] As often as we notice these influences, we can consciously interact with them. However, our imagination is being supplied with images that will impact how we view the world whether or not we are aware that we are taking them in. Because cultural conversation requires a level of intentionality and awareness, it is unable to fully address the formation of the imagination being accomplished through popular media.

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[208] Giroux, 105.

Category 3: Faith-Formative Practices

While the above two strategic categories address ways in which Christians may respond to or interact with media content of the broader popular culture, the third category is more directly involved with the work of culture-making within the Christian community.

Potter uses the language of the "personal locus" to describe the "goals and drives" that motivate us. These drives, not always consciously recognized, shape our pre-cognitive automatic functioning. He argues that a weak locus, which is marked both by low drive energy and unawareness of goals, will result in a situation in which the media will "exercise a high degree of control over exposures and information processing."[209] A stronger locus, however, will result in greater media literacy.

In a similar vein, Jeanne Steele sums the research by saying, "Teens' sense of who they are (personal identity) and where they fit in the world (social identity) drives their choices about what media they will attend to under what circumstances (selection) and influences what they take away (application) from those encounters (interaction)."[210]

While Potter sees it as unreasonable and impossible to keep this personal locus in our consciousness at all times, he argues that media literacy "requires you to fully engage your personal locus in bursts where you examine things you usually take for granted, gain new insights, and then use those insights to reprogram your mental code. This reprogramming corrects faulty information, uninformed opinions, and damaging behaviors.

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[209] Potter, 17.

[210] Jeanne Rogge Steele, "Media Practice Model." In Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Ed. *Encyclopedia of Children, Adolescents, and the Media vol. 2* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007): 533-534.

Then, once these corrections are made to your mental codes, you can return to automatic processing, where your corrected codes will better help you achieve your goals for information and entertainment."[211] Therefore, while the development of media skills creates deliberate, conscious processes for media interaction, the development of the personal locus guides the automatic processes themselves. Within a Christian framework, spiritual disciplines and liturgical practices create contexts in which this sort of development regularly takes place, coloring the rest of our interactions, albeit subconsciously.

Mary Hess discusses the implications of postmodern media scholarship on religious educators in media studies. She argues that, rather than viewing the media as instruments of transmission, we should think of them through a metaphor of ritual. In this context, the strength of religious educators comes "from our ability to give people access to the symbolic, narrative, and sacramental resources of a faith community, as well as our function as a witness to the prophetic voices emerging both from within and without faith communities."[212]

James K.A. Smith is currently one of the preeminent voices for emphasis on faith-formative practices in Christian formation. He points out the extent to which we are formed by the rituals of daily life, which he refers to as "secular liturgies." He argues that commercial establishments like Victoria's Secret interact with shoppers on the level of imagination and desire, while Church-based efforts at Christian formation tend to be geared particularly toward the mind, either toward the formation of particular doctrines

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[211] Potter, 17.

[212] Mary E. Hess, "From Trucks Carrying Messages to Ritualized Identities: Implications for Religious Educators of the Postmodern Paradigm Shift in Media Studies." *Religious Education* 94 no. 3 (1999): 274.

or, more broadly, of a Christian world-view. "While Victoria's Secret is fanning a flame

in our *kardia*, the church is striking water to our minds. While secular liturgies are entic-

ing us with affective images of a good life, the church is trying to convince us otherwise

by depositing ideas."[213] While idea-based formation may well involve mental assent,

even strongly felt, it does not necessarily shape one's desires. The result is that we are

insufficiently motivated to act on that which we affirm, because

> Our ultimate love moves and motivates us because we are lured by this
> picture of human flourishing. Rather than being pushed by beliefs, we are
> pulled by a *telos* that we desire. It's not so much that we're intellectually
> convinced and then muster the willpower to pursue what we ought; rather,
> at a precognitive level, we are attracted to a vision of the good life that has
> been painted for us in stories and myths, images and icons. It's not primar-
> ily our minds that are captivated but rather our *imaginations* that are cap-
> tured, and when our imagination is hooked, *we're* hooked (and sometimes
> our imaginations can be hooked by very different visions than what we're
> feeding into our minds).[214]

Because of all this, it is necessary to reframe our conception of Christian formation to

target not just doctrines and worldviews, but the "social imaginary," or the world of im-

ages through which we see and imagine the "good life." This formation, for Smith, must

include our own ritual or liturgical practices. His usage of this term is broad; he sees

shopping as liturgical, in that it is one of many of the repeated practices that form our de-

sires.[215]

Though broader, Smith's definition of liturgical action certainly includes the overt

rites and ceremonies of the Church. The weekly practices of coming together, attending

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[213] Smith, 127.
[214] Smith, 54.
[215] Smith, 33.

to the Word, affirming the Creed, interceding for the Church and the world, collecting

and offering, breaking bread, sharing communion, and going forth with God's blessing

are not just an extended mental exercise through which we hear and digest doctrines.

These practices, in themselves, form us. Because they are done deliberately and repeated-

ly, they create contexts in which we regularly and knowingly affirm and build up our

faith through our actions.

Geertz gives language to explain the formative power of liturgy, stating that ritual

action, "engulfs the total person, transporting him, so far as he is concerned, into another

mode of existence."[216] Religious belief, day by day, is "the pale remembered reflection of

that experience in the midst of everyday life."[217] Yet the ritual action is not without ongo-

ing effect. It's immersive quality creates a setting that "alters, often radically, the whole

landscape presented to common sense, alters it in such a way that the moods and motiva-

tions induced by religious practice seem themselves supremely practical, the only sensi-

ble ones to adopt given the way things 'really' are."[218] Once the ritual has ended and one

returns to his usual mode of existence, "a man is—unless, as sometimes happens, the ex-

perience fails to register—changed. And as he is changed, so also is the common-sense

world, for it is now seen as but the partial form of a wider reality which corrects and

completes it."[219]

Because the faith development of adolescents is so shaped by the larger communi-

ty surrounding them, the strength of relational connection to the Christian community is

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[216] Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 119-120.
[217] Geertz, 120.
[218] Geertz, 122.
[219] Geertz, 122.

directly proportional to the formative influence that this community can have upon any given youth. Thus, rites of inclusion are particularly valuable insofar as the communal bonds of the Christian community are strengthened, contributing to a stronger sense of Christian identity. This includes rites of initiation like Baptism; even in a paedo-baptistic contexts, where one may not remember the moment of one's own baptism, regular participation in the service of baptism strengthens the community's consciousness of a common origin through identification with Christ. The Church's common experience of Baptism, an experience recalled and renewed through continual participation in the baptismal liturgy, is identity-forming in that it "articulates an antithesis with respect to the world. In constituting a people, God constitutes a *peculiar* people—a called-out people who are marked as strange because they are a community that desires the kingdom of God."[220]

Confirmation, as it has developed historically, has the potential of functioning as a complete rite of passage for adolescents growing up within the Church, in which their continued place in the Christian community is affirmed, and a transition to adult participation is fostered and marked. Confirmation presupposes an extended process through which Confirmands have been taught, by adults within the community, the foundational essentials of the Christian faith, in terms of doctrine, ethics, and spirituality. This means that the rite of Confirmation itself is intended to serve as a mark of punctuation at the end of a more extended "ritual" of formation that can take place over years, in which the place of youth in the community is affirmed by the investment of adults who intentionally pass along their faith.

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[220] Smith, 187.

The timing of Confirmation varies widely, but the current trend is toward encouraging adolescents to be confirmed later, so that the adult commitment presupposed by Confirmation can be made at a time when youth truly are increasing in personal autonomy. Westerhoff and Willimon suggests it not take place in the teenage years at all, but during young adulthood.[221] This accords with general observations that the traditional markers of maturity and independence that point to the entry into adulthood are generally occurring later in life, and with the reality that much of the searching and questioning of one's faith is likely to take place not only in high school, but in early adult years. Thus, according to Westerhoff, if one has not transitioned from "searching faith" to "owned faith," encouraging youth to make a mature, adult commitment to Christ may short-circuit an important process in which they personally commit to the faith through the process of questioning. Instead, Westerhoff suggests that, perhaps, the practice of Confirmation of early adolescents be replaced with another rite through which youth are invited to ask questions, affirming their place in the Church community even as they do so.[222]

While different approaches could have an integrity of their own, it seems unnecessary to delay Confirmation for those older teenagers who are seeking it. Confirmation itself is, among other things, a communal marker and affirmation of transition. Once youth have received and internalized the foundational elements of the Christian faith and life, the adults who have personally invested in those youth present them and affirm that

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[221] John H. Westerhoff III & William H. Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning through the Life Cycle* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 80-82.
[222] Westerhoff, 98.

they are duly prepared, after which time the Church corporately prays for sustaining and empowering grace. The relationship between the Confirmand the Church changes; he or she is now seen as an adult disciple of Christ, and invited by other adult disciples to live and serve in the community as a peer, not a child. If this transition happens toward the end of high school, and if the adults in the Church honestly and explicitly begin to relate to the newly confirmed disciple as a peer, this could go a long way in strengthening one's Christian identity in early adult years. Rather than the young adult, now entering higher education away from home or experiencing increased independence in another manner, associating their Christian experience with a childhood now being left behind, the Church can be the community in which, through a process of preparation, transition, and reception as a peer, the adolescent is first welcomed into the adult world.

Beyond rites of initiation, the Church performs what Hiebert calls "rites of intensification." He argues that rituals serve by "enacting the norms that order relationships," that they "give visual expression to the deep cultural norms" and "public expression to the moral order,"[223] Through these rituals, such as the weekly Sunday celebrations and the festivals of the Church year, the church has regular opportunity to "recall and reaffirm" our worldviews. This is done, not only by receiving sermons in isolation, but through song, movement, and ritual action. The regular practice of Eucharist, with its emphasis on our communion not only with God, but with one another as members of one Body, is a repeated community-forming and community-sustaining action. In it we also,

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[223] Paul Hiebert, Transforming Worldviews (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). 82-83

through regularly reaching out to receive the elements of the Eucharist, affirm and deeply internalize our continual dependence upon God.

Seasons of the Christian year provide opportunities to isolate and celebrate key foundational elements of the Gospel message. Given that, Biblically, a robust eschatology is a regular feature for those who faithfully maintain their Christian identity in a culturally non-dominant setting as "sojourners", particular attention can be given to the season of Advent, a season which emphasizes the promises around Christ's coming, making use of the rich imagery of the prophets. By stocking the imagination with these images and engaging in practices of hopeful waiting, the Christian is given resources to better imagine, desire, and orient life toward the vision of abundant life given in the Scriptures.

Celebrations of the lives of the saints—that is, those faithful people who the Church celebrates as exemplars of faith and life— is a practice that can broaden one's social imaginary immensely, providing glimpses of holiness, joy, and virtue. These images live in the Christian's imagination in parallel to the heroes and heroines of popular films and stories, who too often present a shallow image of greatness achieved by aggression or charm. Examining celebrity culture, Detweiler and Taylor state that "Protestant skepticism regarding 'religious saints' may have encouraged the rampant canonization of secular saints instead," then questioning, "Which is preferable? An array of time-tested saints connected to particular questions and needs or a constellation of freshly minted stars popping up on sitcoms, advertisements, and talk shows?"[224] They suggest that Pope John Paul II's canonization of more saints "than all the other twentieth-century popes

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[224] Detweiler and Taylor, 117.

combined" is "a brilliant, subversive, and enduring response to celebrity culture. We must recognize the value of role models, of mere humans who dare to live Christlike lives. If not, what values will be provided by our secular saints?"[225] While the causal connection between Protestant skepticism and the rise of celebrity culture is far from established, it stands that a culture of veneration for the saints stocks the imagination with a variety of examples of blessedness that stem from a very different source than the personalities most prominent in popular culture.

All of these sorts of rituals of intensification exist in the life of the Church, but are reinforced, in terms of formative influence, when they are paralleled by rituals in family or personal life. The weekly rites of intensification in Sunday worship, for example, can live alongside daily rituals of intensification, which could be as complex as the daily offices or as simple as family prayer in bed or at table.[226] In either case, the practice of coming to a moment where the everyday is brought into explicit relation with the ultimate, even if it lasts only a few minutes, marks the rest of the moments in an enduring way.

Other rituals of intensification mark major transitions in life, such as marriage and death. Regular attendance at services of Christian marriage reinforces for all members of the community the Biblical meaning of and norms around marriage, just as regular attendance at Christian burial proclaims and celebrates the blessed hope of resurrection. These

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[225] Detweiler and Taylor, 117.
[226] These are Smith's "practices beyond Sunday". See Smith, 212.

norms and articles of faith are expressed in word and ritual, and received not just through mental assent, but affectively.

Such formative impact on the affections, desires, and imaginations of Christians can not only be claimed by the formally liturgical actions of the Church, but by its less formal "rituals" as well— any repeated acts of the Christian community, including community meals, mission trips, service projects, and even Church work days. Each of these expresses and enacts the Christian vision of the blessed life in its own way. Roehlkepartain and Patel identify several aspects of the communal life of the Church that participate in the spiritual development of young people, either positively or negatively: sacred symbols and space; networks of formal and informal mentoring relationships; an environment that is warm and caring and that expects service to others; common beliefs, values, and standards translated into "worldviews, language, and stories"; ritual and liturgy; social, educational, and leadership opportunities; common policies and procedures that govern how communal life carries forward.[227] By paying attention to these embodied aspects of congregational life, we will be forming a context for the growth of Christian affections and imaginations.

This discussion around formative practices within the life of the Church is not a tangent from the longer discussion about strategies for directing the formative influence of the popular media. The imagination is formed by the atmosphere in which one is immersed, and distinctly Christian ritual actions create an immersive experience filled with

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[227] Eugene C. Roehkepartain and Eboo Patel, "Congregations: Unexamined Crucibles for Spiritual Development," in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, edited by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Pamela Ebstyne King, Linda Wagener, & Peter L. Benson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 328-330.

the images, words, and norms of the Christian faith, received in an embodied manner. When the Christian receives and seeks to "make sense" of any cultural product, these embodied resources become part of the framework through which this takes place. While we seek to build up skills in how to interact with the words, images, and norms presented in works of popular culture, we can not ignore the important role that the immersive and enacted experiences of the Christian community will have in shaping those interactions.

Implications for Workshop Design

While an 8-week workshop is necessarily heavy on cultural conversation and skill building, this workshop attempts to take seriously the formative power of those historic practices proper to the Christian community. Therefore, this workshop is designed to take a synthetic approach, seeking to simultaneously develop boundaries (cultural abstinence), skills (cultural conversation), and habits (faith-formative practices).

This synthesis employs "Immersive Abstinence," encouraging habitual periods of abstinence from consumption of specific products of popular culture (ie. TV, movies, etc), coupled with immersive faith-formative practices, particularly those that engage the imagination with the language and imagery of the Scriptures. This sort of abstinence does not stem from a binary value judgement on these forms of media, but serves as a sort of ritual of intensification in which one withdraws from what is not ultimate to give attention to and be formed by that which is, and simultaneously withdraws from certain patterns of automaticity to be more conscious of that which is one hears and sees. Within liturgical contexts in which Lent and, to a lesser extent, Advent serve as seasons of such

intensification, and Fridays throughout the year are days in which acts of discipline and devotion are highly encouraged, such opportunities may already be built into the Church's rhythm of life. In these contexts, this approach could simply extend the definition of fasting to include abstinence from media consumption, an innovation appropriate in a time when such media has become so readily available. The very act of taking on a Rule of Life that puts limitations around the consumption of such media for the sake of one's spiritual health is formative, as it relegates the media to a position of non-ultimacy, its use being guided by more ultimate priorities.

The use of both seasonal and weekly periods of immersive abstinence allows for extended seasons focused on faith formative experiences, as well as more regular intensifying experiences that continue to form the habitual subjection of our media interactions to a Rule of Life. The extended periods, characterized both by sustained withdrawal from certain patterns of media interaction and by deliberate engagement in new habits, create the context in which new habits have time to form. The goal is that, when the period of intensive discipline has ended, one's automatic responses have changed.[228] Weekly experiences of abstinence provide a continual check to ensure that one is not drifting unintentionally into unhealthy patterns.

This synthesis also includes liturgical response to cultural conversation. That is, while leading youth into deliberate interaction with the language, imagery, norms, and assertions of the popular media, students are invited to plan and participate in faith-form-

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[228] This is similar to Smith's understanding of a "monastic" pattern of cultural interaction, which involves both a deliberate reduction in "quantity-of-immersion" and a rhythm of daily worship. See Smith, 209-211.

ing liturgical experiences in response to these interactions. The form of experiences practiced should mirror the breadth of appropriate responses to the content of the media with which one is interacting. Once cultural conversation helps us to discern an appropriate Christian response, liturgical action creates a context in which we can at least take first steps in embodying that response. In this workshop, five liturgical responses correspond to the five skill areas being emphasized. Intercession corresponds to the habit of listening and understanding, as a way to embody a compassionate response to one's neighbor. Confession of sin naturally flows from receiving a critique of one's actions or attitudes. Meditation on Scripture and the Gospel story is a response to the detection of hidden narratives, as a means of pondering deeply the implications of the Gospel on our view of reality. In response to the recognition of persuasive attempts, one exercises the practice of Declaration, or the speaking forth of truths revealed in Holy Scripture. The Creeds are a sort of declaration. When we come up against a philosophy or worldview, explicit or implied, that is contrary to the view of God, self, justice, etc. shown forth by Scripture, explicit declaration of revealed truth can be a form of response, juxtaposed with that which was "declared" in and through the media. "Reckoning something to be so is to agree with what God sees and says. It is putting on God's glasses to see the world as God sees it… Reckoning is bringing our minds in line with the mind of God."[229] Finally, when we discover common ground, therefore seeing evidence of common grace, it is appropriate to give thanks for it.

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[229] Lafountain, Richard, *Time Alone With God. (*Grove City, PA: Self-published book, 2012).

The range of these responses is intended to establish a new way of interacting with the media. It is not simply to be evaluated, but is a conversation partner to be interacted with in a humble, holistic, and theocentric manner. This "exercise" of responding liturgically to cultural conversation has the goal of establishing new habits, in which repenting of one's sins, interceding for those in need, declaring Biblical truth, meditation on God's Word, or giving thanks for what is good are normal responses to cultural conversation in any context.

In the workshop design, both of these strategies are employed together, with the goal of reordering our habitual responses to popular media; during a period of immersive abstinence, consumption of certain forms of media is limited to occasions in which deliberate cultural conversation and an embodied, liturgical response will occur. This creates a period in which one is both exercising new habits of cultural interaction and limiting the opportunities to exercise the older habits being displaced.

Relevance of Strategic Categories to Sojourner/Exile Motif

The synthetic approach being employed in this workshop, including the adoption of a Media Rule of Life and cultivation of the five skills and corresponding habits being highlighted, is intended to aid Christian students as they seek to live faithfully the various dimensions of the Biblical motif of sojourners and exiles, particularly the embrace of an *alternative identity* that distinguishes members of the Christian community from the broader culture in terms of identity, beliefs, and behavior, continued good-faith *participation* in the life of the broader culture insofar as can be done while being faithful to one's

Christian identity, robust *eschatology* that strengthens the believer at the level of imagination to persevere, and advancement of the *mission* of God through faithfully living in the tensions inherent in this way of life.

The task of creating boundaries around media usage through the creation of a Media Rule of Life requires ongoing discernment into the impact that media content will have on one's Christian formation. This involves questions of quantity and quality; certainly, there always have been and continue to be elements of cultural production that are simply deemed unfit for Christian consumption whatsoever. Additionally, the decision to impose limits on the quantity of media input is done in part to prevent the language, narratives, and imagery of the media from drowning the voices that come from within the Christian community. These boundaries are intentionally creating a setting in which one can continue to be formed by the Christian community, with its own distinctive identifying values. Yet, boundaries also foster the context in which good-faith cultural participation can occur; if the boundaries are well-constructed, they create a context in which one can step into cultural interactions boldly, knowing that the structures are in place for this interaction to be constructive.

The skill of detecting hidden narratives and the corresponding habit of meditation on the Christian story is also related to the maintenance of a distinctively Christian identity. This skill is built in knowledge that the stories that inform a Christian understanding of goodness and identity are distinct. The ability to discern hidden narratives assists us in recognizing contradictory stories so that we can consciously renounce and resist them. Meanwhile, meditation on the Christian story, whether it takes place in the cycle of the

Church Year or in specific and focused moments of devotion, makes the Biblical story clear and close to us, something to be embraced not only by mental assent, but with the imagination. Christian meditation, because of its engagement with the imagination, can also be seen as a tool for strengthening one's eschatology, in that one embraces the not-yet-seen hope first by believing and imagining it.

The skill of recognizing the persuasive intent of media products and the positions and perspectives being advanced enables one to see clearly the issues at stake, rather than unknowingly surrendering, even if only in part, that which is distinctively Christian. Inoculation prepares us to resist attempts to persuade us, either subtly or directly. Declaration reinforces with clarity what we believe. This skill, thus, is also oriented toward the clarification and preservation of a distinctly Christian identity and outlook.

The skills of listening to understand and of taking a correction, and the disciplines of intercession and confession that correspond to them, are aimed primarily at the goal of fostering a fuller cultural participation on the part of Christians. Through these, the Christian is seeking to know, to understand, and rightly to love one's neighbor outside of the Christian community, and to enter cultural conversation with such humility that one is willing to receive a corrective word and make confession as necessary. These habits create a framework for cultural conversation based upon respect, love, and humility, in which we are partners in a dialogical relationship. These skills are also strongly related to Christian participation in mission, as intimate and accurate knowledge of the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of one's neighbors is an aid in speaking the gospel

clearly and contextually to those neighbors, and as one who enters conversation with humility is more likely to be taken seriously.

The skill of finding common ground is also heavily oriented toward the work of mission, in that this is the place where "strategic alliances" are forged, and that which is distinctly Christian can be applied to clarify or strengthen a point of common agreement between Christians and those outside of the Christian community. The discovery of common ground provides creative contexts for the winsome interaction of the Gospel with the broader culture. Hess argues that Bruggemann's interpretation of the dilemma of people in exile can be used in the context of religious communities interactions with the mass media. We can choose from one of "three responses: assimilation; despair; and 'fresh, imaginative theological work, recovering the old theological traditions and recasting them in terms appropriate to the new situation of faith in an alien culture.'"[230] This is the goal of the skill of finding common ground.

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[230] Hess, 286-287. Citing W. Bruggemann, *Cadences of home: Preaching among exiles (*Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 116.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

From January 25 through March 22, 2018, I ran a pilot workshop entitled, "Joining the Conversation: Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Electronic Media Use." The workshop met over eight Thursday evenings at at the home of one HBE family in Danvers, Massachusetts. Information from student work was gathered each week, used to evaluate whether students were growing in the five skills being highlighted.

Early Attempts

I made an initial attempt to run a 12-week course during the daytime hours, beginning September 2017, offered at CTR. It was advertised to members of CTR, as well as through various homeschool networking organizations. Only a few students responded, all from CTR. Suggestions made by those who were interested but unable to participate were that it is difficult for students to sign up for enrichment opportunities in the beginning of the school year, but that, once they have adjusted to the course load involved, a second or third quarter offering may be more attractive. The simple lack of response from outside of my own congregation suggested that mass advertising was not likely to be a helpful way for drawing participants from the local homeschooling community.

Seeking a context that already brought together a large number of HBE students, I made a second attempt to offer the 12-week course through New Hope Tutorials, based in Boxford, MA, which offers courses and workshops for HBE high-school and middle-

school students. Their Registrar encouraged me to reduce the scope from 12 weeks to 8 weeks, arguing from experience that the shorter time commitment would likely draw more students. She also encouraged me to offer this as a workshop with no homework, so that students would feel free to sign up without adding significantly to their workload. The original design had students viewing longer media selections at home and journalling about them before attending sessions, and involved a student presentation in the second half of the course. I redesigned my material accordingly, but in the end New Hope declined to host this workshop.

Finally, I reached out to a well-connected HBE family that attends CTR, asking them if they would be willing to host the re-designed 8-week workshop at their home at a time of their own choosing, and to promote the workshop themselves through their own personal relational networks. I simultaneously offered it to members of the youth group of CTR and to students at Covenant Christian Academy (CCA), a local Christian high school. While a few students at CCA expressed initial interest, none actually participated. Once it was determined that the workshop would be offered on a Thursday evening, making it potentially available to those enrolled in school outside of their homes, I decided to broaden the demographic of participants to include former HBE students who were in their first year of public high school, realizing that a substantial number of HBE students end up moving into public schooling during high school, but have still received a substantial amount of socialization in HBE.

Participants

Participants were Christian high school students (age 14-18) currently or recently (within the last year) involved in home-based education, all in reasonable driving distance from the workshop location in Danvers, Massachusetts. While the original goal of this study was to include 15-20 students, the actual number of participants was 12. 9 of these students were enrolled in HBE, while 3 were in their first year of public education.

Workshop Methodology

This workshop was designed to employ the synthetic approach outlined above. The eight sessions were broken into three distinct sections. Part 1, which lasted only for the first session, was focused on the development of healthy boundaries around use of media. The first hour was given to teaching about boundaries, aimed at the development of a Media Rule of Life (MRL). Because the MRL was a focus of this teaching, emphasis was also given to the development of faith-formative practices, in this context referred to as "habits." The second hour was a time for students to work on the development of their own MRL for the duration of this workshop. Students were invited to sign their MRL and we prayed a prayer of dedication, offering these weeks as a time of intentional discipline and asking grace to grow through the disciplines outlined. Students were also encouraged to find somebody who would be willing to ask them regularly about one's keeping of the MRL, who would also sign it. While only one session is given to the development of a MRL, it is an essential part of the workshop, providing a framework within which all the other work of the workshop will take place.

Part 2, consisting of sessions 2-6, was focused on skill building. The first portion of each of these sessions was given to a teaching, each focused on a different one of the five skills emphasized in this workshop, and on a habit that corresponds to that skill. The second hour of each session was given to a discussion in which students were invited to practice the skill that had been the focus of that day's teaching, in relation to a media selection which was chosen for that day. These selections included a portion of a television episode, a Youtube video, a commercial, and two songs. After each selection, students were invited to complete a 10-15 minute journaling assignment. Then, for whatever skill had been taught that day, a handout was distributed that served as a written guide for practicing that skill. After skill practice, students responded to their discussion by practicing the habit emphasized that day, also following a written guide.

Part 3, consisting of class sessions 7-8, was focused on practicing the skills and habits already introduced in Part 2. No new skills or habits were introduced during these weeks. Instead, the first portion of each session was given to watching longer media selections, using hour-long streaming television content. After completing the same journaling assignment used in Part 2, students decided together on which of the five skills and corresponding habits would be most fruitfully employed in relationship to the day's selection. Based upon their response, I used the corresponding Skill Practice and Habit Practice guides from Part 2 in leading the ensuing conversation and response. The intention was to use more complex selections so that, while Part 3 is geared largely toward continuing to reinforce and practice what had already been introduced, students would also

practice discernment in recognizing and selecting various ways in which they might appropriately interact with this content.

Workshop Content

Full outlines for each of the teaching sessions used in this workshop are provided in Appendix 1.

The media selections for Part 2 and Part 3 of the workshop was selected with two main criteria. First, the content must lend itself to the application of the skill emphasized in this workshop. During Part 2, it was necessary that they correspond to the skill practiced during the particular workshop session for which they were assigned. Selections during this part were intended to relate to these skills in ways that were clear and unambiguous, so that those just being introduced to these skills would be able to make the appropriate connections and confidently put these skills into practice. This is not to suggest that it would be impossible or inappropriate to apply more than one skill. During Part 3, the complexity of the material was considered to be higher, so that students could reasonably apply more than one skill to each film.

Second, the material must be appropriate for a teen audience. In this case, care was exercised in terms of sexual or violent content, and in terms of strong language. While these selections were not devoid of such content, the inclusion of such content was done with care, both because of the concerns listed in the previous chapter, and because the primary purpose of these selections is the practice of specific skills, so such material was thought to be distracting where it did not relate to such practice.

The material selected, along with a brief summary of the rationale for these selections, follows. "Scars to Your Beautiful"[1] was selected corresponding to the skill of "Listening to Understand". It explores the psychology of young women who engage in self-destructive behavior in search for beauty, and questions cultural perceptions of beauty. It delves into the mental and emotional state of those whose behavior may otherwise seem mystifying.

13 Reasons Why (2017),[2] rated TV-MA, is a Netflix series themed on teen suicide. While a high school community processes the suicide of one of their students, a series of thirteen cassette tapes begin circulating among thirteen students. Each tape is addressed to one of those students, showing how their behavior drove her to her suicide. While some are concerned that the series glamorizes and justifies suicidal behavior and may be resulting in a net increase in suicidal ideation[3], it also highlights the different ways in which everyday behavior of high school students can contribute to suicidal ideation. While difficult themes, such as rape, emerge later in the series, only the first episode are selected for the purposes of this workshop. This selection relates to the skill of "Receiving a Correction," as the behaviors highlighted in these episodes, particularly gossip and personal betrayal, are relevant to personal examination for most adolescents. The portion of the episode we watched did not address the suicide that is a major theme in the series

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1 Alessia Cara, "Scars to Your Beautiful" *Know-It-All. (*Def Jams Recording, 2015), streaming music.

2 *13 Reasons Why*. "Tape 1, Side A." Season 1, Episode 1. Directed by Tom McCarthy. Written by Brian Yorkey. Netflix, March 21, 2017.

3 Barrie Sueskind "How '13 Reasons Why' Hurts: The Danger of Glamorizing Teen Suicide." GoodTherapy.org. July 25, 2017. Accessed June 9, 2018. https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/how-13-reasons-why-hurts-danger-of-glamorizing-teen-suicide-0725174.

as a whole; otherwise, it would have been necessary to directly address the potential glamorization and justification of suicide being put forward.

"Stronger (What Doesn't Kill You),"[4] by Kelly Clarkson, is filled with the repeated line, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," which itself comes from Nietzsche[5]. The tune is catchy and the hearer is drawn to sympathize with the singer, who demonstrates indomitable spirit as she emerges from a difficult and, apparently, abusive relationship. Rather than being destroyed by behavior intended to "break" her, she starts over and come back "swinging." However, a closer look suggests a perspective on the world that is closer to Nietzsche's "will to power" than Christian patience in adversity. Rather than coming to an end of herself and calling upon God or any external power, her victory is centered on "just me, myself, and I," and the change in herself that she celebrates is "finally thinking about me." No relationship outside of her own self is necessary either for strength of fullness of life; she stands on her own two feet as "a fighter," dependent on nobody else. This song was selected in connection with the skill of "Detecting Hidden Narratives," as the song is saturated in this view of the world, but does not explicitly present it. The catchy tune and winsomeness of a character emerging unscathed out of an abusive context make it likely that the song will be embraced uncritically, and that the hidden narrative behind it will work its way into the imagination of the listeners.

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[4] Kelly Clarkson. "Stronger (What Doesn't Kill You.)" *Stronger* (Echo Studio, 2011), streaming music.

[5] Frederich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols,* Translated by Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

"Feel Something Again"[6] is a commercial aired at the 2018 Super Bowl, which we used in a workshop session shortly after it was first aired. It pictures Aerosmith's Steve Tyler, aged and tired appearing, getting into a Kia Stinger on a racetrack, and driving in full reverse. It transports him back in time, and a younger version of himself appears, surrounded by adoring fans. The ad ends with the words "Feel Something Again." This was selected in connection with the skill of Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent in part because it is not marketed to high school students, but more toward those facing a mid-life crisis, giving the students an opportunity to see the commercial and its communications methods very much from an outside perspective. In many ways, it is a textbook example, in that it briefly supplies us with an ideal, a sort of description of abundant life: to feel something. However, age can reduce one's ability to feel with the same intensity, so the Kia Stinger is presented as good news. With a car like this, even somebody who is old and tired has some hope of feeling with the intensity of youth. By drawing attention to the image of "blessedness" being put forward, students were given the opportunity to practice the skill of noticing the use of those images in advertisement, consciously questioning both the image the claims made about the product advertised.

"Fault Vs Responsibility"[7] is a 2-minute video clip from Will Smith, which was being broadly shared on social media during the time of the workshop. Smith encourages listeners to set aside the work of assigning blame for the problems that face them, and

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[6] "2018 Kia Stinger - Steven Tyler Big Game Ad - Feel Something Again." Kia Motors America, February 1, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YVbVXOjJv4. Accessed June 5, 2018.
[7] Will Smith, "Fault Vs Responsibility by Will Smith FULL SPEECH". WhateveritTakesMotivation, Published January 31, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USsqkd-E9ag. Accessed June 5, 2018.

choosing to take responsibility to address those problems. It was chosen in connection

with Finding Common Ground, because of resonance with the Christian doctrine of for-

giveness. Smith clearly recognizes that blaming other people for problems can give those

people power over us, and that we need to set aside blame in order to move forward. With

this, Christians can agree fully. Smith does not discuss forgiveness, but his work leaves

the door open for a Christian to speak of the need for and power of forgiveness, drawing

from and adding to what Smith has already said. In fact, students in the workshop very

quickly recognized that God himself had taken Smith's approach; in Christ, God re-

deemed us by taking upon himself the responsibility and full consequence of human sin,

forgiving us freely. This clip creates an opportunity for a Christian to be in strong agree-

ment with an artifact of popular culture in a way that leads very quickly into speaking of

things at the heart of the gospel message.

"Black Stockings"[8] is an episode in the first season of *Lore*, an Amazon Original

series. Based on a podcast by Aaron Mahnke, who is a member of Christ the Redeemer

and an alumnus of Gordon-Conwell, *Lore* bears the unique distinction of being a main-

stream horror series in based largely on the work of a devout Christian in our own com-

munity. It brings attention to darker examples of human behavior, raising questions par-

ticularly about the way humans often respond to fear and uncertainty. This particular

episode focuses on the murder of Bridget Cleary by her husband, who is convinced that

she is not, in fact, his wife, but a changeling mimicking her form. It focuses on the ten-

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[8] *Lore.* "Black Stockings." Season 1, Episode 3. Directed by Darnell Martin, Thomas Wright, Nick Copus, Michael Satrazemis. Written by David Chiu, Patrick Wall. Amazon Studios, October 13, 2017.

sion between Irish faerie lore, the Christian faith, and medical science. In this case, Christian faith and medical science are both distinguished from the superstition of faerie lore. Students were invited to choose which of the five skills of this workshop they would practice in responding to this selection, and they chose "Finding Common Ground." The inherent tension was that, while the Mahnke's perspective is consciously Christian, the violent mode of presentation was disturbing and off-putting for a large number of the students. Those who did not already know Mahnke were quite surprised, after viewing and discussing the episode, to learn more about him.

"Cut Man" is the second episode of *Daredevil* (2015),[9] a Netflix series rated TV-MA. The protagonist and hero, who takes to the street in a poorly fashioned mask to fight crime, was blinded in childhood, and has since developed his other senses to be extraordinarily sharp, along with martial arts skills. While, as part of the superhero genre, the series contains graphic violence, it stands out in a two distinct ways. First, the hero, Matthew Murdock, regularly walks out of his adventures with considerable pain and injury, and sees heroism and suffering as inherently connected, even connecting this insight with his Catholic upbringing. Second, it becomes clear that, while he is motivated by a passion for justice for the weak and oppressed, the hero questions the morality of his own violent actions in pursuit of justice, so that viewers are invited into that moral struggle. Both his hunger for justice and the role of suffering resonate strongly with a Christian perspective, while at the same time the violent means through which that justice is pursued stand in stark contrast to the ways that Jesus invites his followers to resist evil.

[9] *Daredevil.* "Cut Man." Season 1, Episode 2. Directed by Phil Abraham. Written by Stan Lee, Bill Everett. ABC Studios, April 10, 2015.

Hence, strong points of agreement create the context for the clarification of a Christian

perspective on violence and justice. The episode also goes back and forth between Mur-

dock's childhood and his adult experiences, showing formative experiences that shape his

actions as an adult. The students chose to use this episode to practice the skill of "Listen-

ing to Understand," paying particular attention to these experiences. However, they did

not limit their discussion to this, and grappled significantly with the ethics of justice-mo-

tivated vigilante violence.

Method of Evaluation

Experimental methodology was created to test the effectiveness of the workshop.

Since the development of five specific skills was a chief goal of this workshop, my hy-

pothesis was that, through participating in this workshop, students would consistently

manifest those five different skills in their written and spoken participation in the work-

shop. While a measured increase in these skills throughout the weeks of the workshop

would also be an indicator of success, it is not a necessary indicator. None of these skills

are intended to be completely new to students— if they were, a steeper learning curve

over seven weeks of data collection would be possible. Rather, these are skills which stu-

dents have had opportunity to develop in other contexts, which may have been under-uti-

lized in the context of consumption of popular electronic media. Thus, student participa-

tion in written and oral exercises that create repeated opportunities to manifest these

skills in this particular context contributes toward the formation of new habits of media

interaction. The more consistently that these skills are manifested, the more thorough the

formation of new habits will be. Thus, if a skill is consistency manifested by students, whether in increasing measure or not, this indicates likely progress toward the consistent and habitual application of this skill.

While not testing primarily for a growth curve, I did look for such a curve, in a desire to test my assumption that those skills that are more open to positive cultural interaction (Listening to Understand, Receiving a Correction, Finding Common Ground) would follow a different growth pattern than those skills that are more protectionist in orientation (Detecting Hidden Narratives, Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent). I hypothesized that the protectionist and culturally-resistant nature of the homeschooling movement would create a context in which the protectionist-oriented skills were more highly developed in students before beginning the workshop than the culturally-open skills, and that the culturally-open skills show more signs of a growth curve during the workshop.

Students were invited at the beginning of the workshop to participate in a research study to evaluate its effectiveness, although participation in the research study was not mandatory for participation in the workshop. All twelve students elected to participate in the research study. Two forms of data were collected. Students completed and turned in a journaling assignment every week from workshop sessions 2-8, through which they interacted with the media selection before discussing it in the group context, with one prompt oriented toward each skill. The prompts were identical each week to provide consistency through the various weeks. Secondly, audio recordings were made during the skill and habit practice of workshop sessions 2-8. The hope was that, by gathering two types of

information, we were more likely to glean meaningful data from students, regardless of whether their information processing style was more personal and internal (in which case journaling assignments were likely to glean more meaningful data) or communal and external (in which case group discussions were likely to glean more meaningful data).

Individual journalling assignments were prepared for analysis by being coded numerically so that analysts would be unaware of the identity of the participant or in which session the assignment was completed. Students were not individually assigned a number consistently through the workshop, so that one piece of data from a given student could not be associated with another, except perhaps by detecting similarities in writing or verbal style. Additionally, any personally identifying information (i.e. names) was blanked out to avoid identification.

Audio recordings were subsequently reduced to a typed transcript and deleted. Again, individual contributions of students were coded numerically in the same unidentifiable manner, and personally identifying information was blanked out.

Three analysts were selected from among Gordon-Conwell students, who did not know the identities of course participants. These analysts were asked to read individual journaling assignments and group discussion discussions, evaluating each student's written and verbal contributions on a Likert scale based on their demonstration of each particular skill. Thus, a fully-participating student would receive two evaluative marks from three analysts for each of the five skills, for every one of seven sessions, resulting in 210 points of data.

I met with the analysts twice, and they did all of the analysis during these meetings. The only exception is that, in the case of one of the three analysts who was unable to attend the second meeting, I had an extended phone conversation before she began her work, sharing as fully as possible what had been discussed during that meeting to provide consistency across analysts. During these meetings, I gave criteria for grading and went through a few sample examples, to help ensure consistency of marking between evaluators. Each evaluator was expected to view each media clip before evaluating student material based on it, and we discussed that material, highlighting the points written above about each clip.

The evaluative scale was as follows. For each skill, a grade of 3 indicated that nothing in the data showed that skill being manifest, while a grade of 4 indicated some presence of that skill being manifest. 5 indicated that the skill was strongly manifested. Meanwhile, a 2 indicated that something in the data showed some level of deficiency in relationship to the skill, while a 1 indicated a strong deficiency.

Once the evaluations were completed, a chart was created for each skill, in which each individual student's results were arranged chronologically, with two fields of information present for each skill, one for the evaluation of journalling data and one for participation in group discussion, for each evaluator. All of this information is presented in Appendix 2.

From this information, data was summarized in three ways. First, data points were counted for each of the seven weeks in which data was collected, showing the concentra-

tion of grading from 1-5. This counting was done separately for each skill, resulting in 35 concentration analyses. This is presented in Appendix 3.

Second, I determined the percentage of students who had significantly manifested various skills significantly. Students were counted as manifesting a skill during a particular session if their their written or verbal contributions received a 4 or 5 rating from at least two analysts. The number of qualifying students was then divided by the number of students who had contributed either written or verbal data. These numbers were calculated separately for each of the seven weeks, for each skill, resulting in 35 separate percentages. These percentages are presented in Appendix 4.

Finally, we determined the percentage of significant manifestation of skills in the same manner described above, isolated written and verbal data. Percentages drawn from journalling data is in Appendix 5, while those drawn from discussion transcript date is in Appendix 6.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

Analysis of data suggests that the pilot workshop had significant success in build-

ing skills of positive cultural interaction (namely, Listening to Understand and Finding

Common Ground), limited success in building protectionist-oriented skills (Detecting

Hidden Narratives and Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent), and little to no

success at building skills around Receiving a Correction. Analysis also shows that the

skills oriented toward positive cultural interaction were practiced in combination with

one another, as were the protectionist-oriented skills. However, skills from both of these

groups were rarely practiced at the same time.

Non-Response

The amount of non-response was high. In some cases, this came from student ab-

sences from particular sessions. Some students rarely spoke up in group conversations,

thus providing little to no transcript data. Some would not fill out or turn in a journalling

response. Still others did turn in a journalling response, but left most or even all of the

questions blank.

It is possible that drawing students from a HBE demographic increased the level

of non-response, as the experience of filling in a worksheet, putting one's name on it, and

turning it in is fairly standard in the public education system, but not necessarily among

those educated at home. A comparative study of HBE and public school students' ability to complete written work of this sort would be enlightening.

Where no data was collected, information fields in Appendix 2 are left blank. Thus, while there are 210 potential points of data per student, the actual number of data points per student varied from 75 to 205. However, some of those data points come from students who provided very little information, leading analysts to mark them with a 3, the baseline number used when neither proficiency nor deficiency was demonstrated.

The level of non-response means that it is possible that students were interacting with the skills in a greater way than is indicated by the data, but we have no way of determining this.

Given this fairly low level of responsiveness, I am defining "significant engagement" in a skill area as occurring when at least one-third of participating students in a particular session manifest that skill in a measurable way. Measurable manifestation of a skill is counted when at least 2 of 3 analysts rate either the written or spoken data produced by that student at 4 or 5 in relation to that skill. (If a student receives one 4 or 5 in written data and another in spoken data for the same date, this is not counted as measurable manifestation, as in each case the higher mark is dismissed as an outlier; the same form of data must receive at least two such high markings to be counted). Thus, measurable manifestation exists wherever a percentage greater than or equal to 33.3 is found in Appendix 4.

Analysis of Data

Students engaged most regularly with the foundational skill of Listening to Understand, with significant engagement in 6 of 7 sessions. After this, the skill of Finding Common Ground had three instances of significant engagement.

Meanwhile, students engaged significantly with the skills of Detecting Hidden Narratives and Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent only once, both of them in the fourth session.

Unsurprisingly, the highest level of significant engagement with each skill generally took place during the session in which both the instruction and the discussion were oriented toward that skill. Data fields for skills that correspond to the subject matter of a particular session are in bold in Appendix 4, showing this trend. The one exception is the skill of Detecting Hidden Narratives, which was the emphasis on the date in which the third set of data was collected, but displayed more prominently in the following week, in which the focus was on Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent. Since the focus of the discussion on persuasion was on the recognizing the definition of blessedness being communicated to the conscious or subconscious mind of those receiving the message, it is unsurprising that this relates to the work of detecting hidden narratives, present in cultural material but not stated and likely not recognized. They are parallel skills that work together, and it is quite possible that the teaching of the previous session on Detecting Hidden Narratives contributed to student participation in the fourth session.

Interestingly, on the weeks when students had significant engagement with skill of Finding Common Ground, they also had higher engagement with Listening to Under-

stand, as if the two skills have an amplifying effect on each other; those who were able to listen and understand what was being communicated were likely to be able to find points of agreement and meaningful interaction between cultural content and Christian principles.

The skill of Receiving a Correction was not engaged in a significant way. It may be that students at this developmental stage are still largely unprepared to engage with this. For students to do so, they would have had to move from a specific example (i.e., in the media selection used in session 2, rapid spreading of gossip though texting and social media technology), to a general corrective principle (that we are fascinated by gossip and that we use our technology to spread it quickly without verifying its truth), and then moving from that general principle to our own personal sins. While this sort of movement between concrete and abstract is possible, it is still in development, so this skill is asking a lot. It is also notable that, in the week when this skill was the focus, students did not interact in a significant way with any other skill.

Students manifested a sort of compartmentalization between the skills of positive cultural interaction and those that are more protectionist. On the weeks when there was significant manifestation of both of the more positive skills, there was no significant interaction with the protectionist ones. Conversely, on the one week when the more protectionist skills were significantly manifested, students interacted very little with Finding Common Ground and only 33.3% showed significant manifestation with Listening to Understand, the bare minimum for being counted as a significant use of that skill. While it is possible that the content did not lend itself to positive interaction, I suspect that it is

more likely that students had trouble interacting positively and critically with the same material; instead, they tended to choose one angle of approach or the other. The amount of data prevents any firm conclusions being made on this subject, but the compartmentalized nature of this data merits further experimentation.

Finally, Appendices 5 and 6 show that the percentages of students manifesting the various skills varies when written and oral data are looked at separately. The written assignment, asking the same questions every week, provides a context in which more than one skill can be significantly manifest at the same time, while the oral data tends to interact with only one skill significantly at a time. Thus, while the oral component, in 4 out of 7 sessions, created a context for significant interaction with the one skill intended as a focus in that discussion, the repetition of the journalling assignment contributed more to the formation of habitual response.

The last two sessions show significant interaction only with the skill of Listening to Understand. These were longer, hour-long media selections in comparison with shorter pieces in the previous weeks. It is possible that the sheer amount of personal narrative present in these pieces created a sort of information overload, so that students were able only to do the foundational work of listening in the time provided, or that they became more personally absorbed in the stories and were not prepared to do work that required analysis from an outside perspective.

The data gives no evidence of a learning curve. To test for the existence of a curve, it would be necessary to more fully control the type of media content, to reduce that variable. Again, it is more important for habit formation that students manifest these

skills in a repeated manner, than that they manifest them in a continually increasing manner over 8 weeks.

Limiting Factors (Anecdotal Observations)

While the skill-building component of the workshop has some demonstrable fruit, several factors undermined the attempt at a more synthetic approach focused on skill building, formation of spiritual habits, and development of clear boundaries.

The most major factor was the lack of personal commitment on part of the students. In the first session, I asked them whether they were present by choice, or because their parents had sent them. There was little sign of resentment or resistance, but the students were acknowledged that they were all in the room at the initiative of their parents. I quickly realized that few of these students had a strong commitment to this process.

When I taught on a Media Rule of Life and encouraged students to put boundaries in place for the eight weeks of the workshop, I received very little response. I gave them a handout to help develop their own MRL, but they did very little with it. I suspect that this was both because they were not yet personally committed to this sort of formation, and because they had not yet received enough instruction on the different skills and habits to be able to competently contribute any positive disciplines to a Rule. This limited the boundaries component of the workshop significantly.

Whereas most of my ministry interactions are with members of my own congregation, this workshop had a significant percentage of people who I had not met until the first day of the workshop. They did not know me and, in many cases, they did not know

each other. It is a difficult context in which to be asked to speak in a personal and vulnerable way. Whether for this or another reason, while students were willing to give input on what a good prayerful response would be, they would seldom pray aloud.

With students coming from a variety of denominational contexts, I received some student push-back on teaching around prayer disciplines. Particularly, when I tried to teach about intercession by modeling one classical way of constructing a prayer, we got diverted by a conversation in which a student vehemently denied that intentionally structuring a prayer would ever have any benefit. This raises questions about the appropriate way to instruct in spiritual practices outside of the context of a church community that corporately values those practices.

I am unwilling to say that, despite these drawbacks, the synthetic approach was wholly absent. Students received instruction around boundaries and an opportunity to think about putting them in place in a disciplined manner, along with more positively-oriented disciplines. It is impossible to know in what ways that instruction has or will be applied, but they certainly were not applied in a united, communal manner during the duration of the course as originally envisioned. Furthermore, we did intentionally respond with prayer disciplines after every discussion; while I had envisioned a higher degree of participation, the habits were modeled, and students at least worked to thoughtfully craft different parts of this prayer response.

The original design of a 12-week course was designed to give opportunity to revisit each skill and habit at least once. The 8-week model, while more successful in draw-

ing a group of students, limited the opportunity to form habits through repeated points of contact, also limiting its effectiveness.

Recommendations

It is possible to use both the statistical and anecdotal observations from this pilot workshop to design a workshop that will be more effective in skill-building and that will reduce some of the limiting factors to the synthesis of spiritual habits and a media rule of life with skill-building exercises.

In order to allow more time to practice the skills and habits, it may be fruitful to reduce the number of skills in focus at any one time. A media workshop focused solely around Listening to Understand and Finding Common Ground, while not a complete formation, would provide a limited scope of skills that amplify each other. The skills of Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent and of Detecting Hidden Narratives could be the focus in a different context. Since indications in this workshop were that students were rarely interacting with these two groups of skills at the same time, it may be that little would be lost from separating them and practicing them in different moments. It seems that the more introspective skills necessary for Receiving a Correction require a higher degree of maturity and may need to come at a later moment of formation.

If a Media Rule of Life is going to be introduced, I recommend that it take place in the middle of a workshop, only after all the skills and habits have been introduced and students have had both the time to develop a personal commitment to them and the training to know how to use them in daily life. Because of the need to do this foundational

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work before introducing a MRL, I also recommend increasing the duration of any workshop, probably back to the original 12-week model.

With this in mind, it is likely that a change of context would be more fruitful. I envision two different ways in which this workshop could be fruitfully offered. The first in in the context of a local congregation or diocese. The advantage is that relationships are pre-existent, and there is a common corporate piety in place. The pre-existent relationships can speed up the process of building trust and buy-in. Meanwhile, the common corporate piety allow for disciplines and prayer habits to be more communally experienced, flowing from those practices of prayer already valued and taught in that community, and following patterns (i.e. the observance of Lent and Advent) already in place.

Alternatively, it may be helpful to develop this sort of workshop in a way that can be offered remotely. I can picture offering teaching in video format, supplemented by resources which can be accessed and used in a home context, one or more families accessing materials and working with them together. If constructed properly, this smaller context would be an environment where people already know and trust each other, and where practices of prayer and discipline are likely to have some degree of consistency. With the instructor out of the room, participants would have no choice but to do the work of response themselves, because no facilitator is present to lead it for them. They would simultaneously benefit from the experience of skill building exercises and prayerful responses developed in a small group, and from teaching and exercises developed from outside. This approach has the potential of reaching a much greater number of people.

These recommendations, if followed, will incorporate the observations made during this pilot workshop into the design of new formational materials that will likely create a more effective synthesis of the three strategic categories in focus. This redesigned course is likely to create a context for HBE students to develop boundaries, skills, and habits that will prepare them, as sojourners in this world, for positive interaction with popular electronic media and, more broadly, with neighbors outside of the Christian community.

APPENDIX 1

WORKSHOP MATERIALS

In the following pages are found materials used in each of the first six sessions of the workshop. Included in each session are (a) a teaching outline, (b) student notes, with blanks intended to be filled out during the teaching, (c) a class discussion exercise designed to practice that session's skill of focus, after hearing or viewing that session's media selection, (d) a class exercise in which students are invited to practice that session's habit of focus, after skill practice is complete. The Weekly Journalling Assignment was used without variation during Sessions 2-8.

During the last two sessions, students were allowed to choose to follow the guide for Skill Practice and Habit Practice from one Sessions 2-6. Therefore, no class materials for these sessions are provided.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 1 - Introduction and Boundaries - Teaching Outline

Introduction
- What do we mean of when we talk about interacting with media as Christians?
  - We listen with love, listening and responding charitably, like we want to be treated ourselves— not unfair or fault-finding. We seek to understand our neighbors, what they are saying, thinking, or feeling.
  - We listen with humility; if there is something true that we need to learn, whether we like it or not, or whether we like the people who made the work of not, we need to be open to hear.
  - We listen with faith; the entire way we look at the world is built on the story of how God created us, how he sent his Son to save us, and how his Spirit continues to be present with us day by day. That perspective changes how we react to lots of what we see and hear.
  - We listen with discernment. Lots of things we see and hear will be trying to convince to believe and do certain things. We pay attention to this and weigh it carefully.
  - We listen with hope that God's grace can be found all over the place, so we look for it, give thanks for it, and expect to find points of common ground with people outside the Christian setting.
  - We listen with prayer, taking what we see and hear to God in all sorts of ways. We do this on purpose until it becomes a habitual response.
  - We listen with wisdom, knowing that not everything we can see or hear is going to be good for us, and we try to build healthy boundaries for our own good.

- How does media (TV, Film, Music, Social Media, Ads) impact us as Christians?
  - It puts us in the middle of our culture's conversation
  - It exposes us to new ideas coming from a breadth of experiences and perspectives
  - It forms our imagination, filling it with words, pictures, and images that will color how we look at the world. This could be helpful, or lead us away from the truth.
  - It forms our desires.
  - It gives us opportunities to understand our neighbors.
  - It could help us to see things more clearly or might deceive us.

- My concern up front:
  - There tend to be two extremes:
    - You simply enjoy the media and take it in without thinking too hard about it.
    - You come in with a critical spirit; this content is not Christian, and so you will find fault with it and pick it apart.
      - This is not a Christian approach—

- If we are Christian, we must be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger"
- If we are Christian, we must love our neighbor and treat them as we wish to be treated.[1]
- Popular media provides opportunities for cultural research.
  - Example: Paul in Acts 17. Not only did he do his research beforehand, but he also took his conversation to the place where people delighted to gather to talk about new ideas.
    - Do you want to share your faith? How does the Gospel matter in the conversations our neighbors are having? This is a chance to put your ear down and listen to the conversation.
    - It is also a chance to get into the conversation. These are the things people talk about. When are you going to hear people having conversations about ideas that really matter? What images, words, ideas are floating around there that we share broadly?
  - Popular Media provides a chance to learn— to look at the world and at yourself from a different angle.
- Our goal is to become discerning listeners, people who pay careful attention to our neighbors and whose respond to them in a thoroughly Christian way.

- There are three strategies we use to relate in a healthy way to the media.
  - Boundaries: We need to make some decisions about what kind and what amount of media consumption is good for us. We need to determine that some things are simply not going to be helpful. We need to decide how much time we can have, and balance that with other inputs (like Scripture, family, study, etc.) so that the media we are viewing doesn't warp our view of reality. A Rule of Life can help us with this, but only if we follow it.
  - Skills: These are things we can learn to do while interacting with the media to make that interaction healthy and helpful. We're going to practice five skills during this course:
  - Listening to Understand
  - Receiving a Critique
  - Detecting Hidden Narratives
  - Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent
  - Finding Common Ground
  - Habits: These are specifically Christian actions; they are things that God's people have always done in obedience to God's Word. We're commanded not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. That doesn't happen automatically, and it doesn't just come from hearing truth. God works through the things that we do to transform us. So we will practice some of these habits, hope-

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[1] This is derived from Adam and Missy Andrews, "Your Assignment: Reading with Integrity." *Worldview Detective: A Socratic Method for Investigating Great Books.* Course Lecture on CD (Rice, WA: Center for Lit, 2015).

fully already familiar. The difference is that we'll do them as part of how we respond to the things that we watch or hear. We will begin to respond in a Christian way by responding with the things that Christians do. These habits are connected with the skills, and will be practiced in connection with them.

- Intercession (once we have listened to understand)
- Confession (once we have received a critique)
- Meditating on the Gospel Story (once we have discerned a hidden narrative)
- Declaration of Truth (once we have recognized an attempt to persuade)
- Thanksgiving (once we have found common ground)

- Organization of Course:
  - Week 1: Boundaries- Creating a Rule of Life
  - Weeks 2-6: Developing Skills and Habits, with teaching and short media selections
  - Weeks 7-8: Practicing Skills and Habits, with longer media selections

- How most classes will run after today:
  - I will start each session introducing one skill and how to practice it, and a prayerful habit that we can use alongside that skill.
  - Then we will watch, read, or listen to something together as a group.
  - You will do a short journalling response, thinking deeply about what you have just heard.
  - We will practice the day's skill together, and thoughtfully preparing a prayerful response to what we have discussed, which we will do together as a closing prayer.
  - During the last two sessions, once the skills have been introduced, we will use the time to watch some slightly longer selections. You will need to determine together which skill is most needed and use it in discussion with one another and in your response.

Boundaries
- Today you are going to be invited to work on developing a "Rule of Life" around your use of the media. There are a few things to notice about this:
  - Usually when you hear "rules" they are something given to you by your parents or somebody else in authority.
  - However, you are moving to a different part of your life, one where the rules may be relaxing, or where they will relax before very long.
  - So what happens if your parents remove all the rules? Does anything go?
    - Example: During my first week of college, I realized that nobody was checking on me, and that if I wanted to wander around town at all hours of the night, I could. That freedom is coming.
  - A Rule of Life is not something made by me, or by your parents. It is made by you.
    - You design it and commit to it.
    - If you share it with other people, they can ask you about it and help you accomplish it, but it is your rule.

- Why should you have rules around media?
  - Anything without limits has a potential of taking over your life.
    - Example: Freshman year of High School, I realized that I had come to an unhealthy place in regards to media, spending lots of time on the computer, Instant Messaging, surfing, and playing video games. But I had no friends and got no exercise. I needed to get a bike and start doing other things. My screen time had pushed other great things out of the way.
    - Thus, it is about putting screen time in limits so that you have space for other important things.
      - The Bedtime Rule: Don't take your device to bed[2]
      - Disconnected Time: Periods of your day when you are "unplugged" and able to be present to what is in front of you.
- What you are watching is effecting you.
  - Your imagination is formed by words, images, and stories. It is what you have to work with when you try to make sense of the world.
    - This is a different part of your brain than the conscious decision-making part.
    - You can take responsibility for forming your imagination!!
  - Perhaps you realize that something is effecting you badly.
    - Example: I realized that, when watching *Seinfeld*, I was laughing at things that are simply unholy. Cognitively, I know it isn't holy, but nonetheless I laughed.
    - Example: Love stories. We can study a Biblical view of sexuality, but if every love story we watch involves a couple ending up in bed together, we have dissonance: a doctrine we believe, but our imagination is filled with sweet stories where, right when you get to the "happily ever after" moment, the protagonists commit a mortal sin. After going through this so many times, it is tough to really believe, deep down, that the sin is that bad. We have lost our sensitivity.
      - Additionally, part of what is going on at this age is that you're coming to grips with the fact that you are designed by God as men and women, and learning what that means. If, at this moment, you fill your mind with lots of relationship stories that are actually not true, you're going to come out with a skewed understanding of reality. These stories aren't all bad, but they aren't reality.
    - Example: Violence. We hear and affirm Jesus' teaching that we should love our enemies and turn the other cheek, but we also enjoy martial arts films, *Braveheart*, or a whole host of First Person Shooter video games. By doing so, we can train ourselves to applaud revenge, rage, and/or cold-blooded killing.
  - Perhaps you are involved in something that is just wrong.
    - Pornography is everywhere, and it is a great injustice— many of the people involved in it are not doing it willingly, it is degrading to them, it distorts the sexual attitudes of those who view it. If you are involved in this, it is time to walk away. A lot of people have trouble walking away— it is like an addiction. If this

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[2] Jodi Gold, *Screen-Smart Parenting: How to Find Balance and Benefit in your Child's Use of Social Media, Apps, and Digital Devices* (New York, The Guilford Press, 2015), 39, 84, 170.

is you, you need to talk to a parent, to me, or to somebody else you trust, and get some help.
- Perhaps you need to take a break to develop new habits.
    - We're going to be training in different skills and habits for media interaction.
    - Perhaps you have bad habits that need to be replaced.
    - It takes several weeks to develop a new habit. One way of doing it is to intentionally break off your "unintentional" use of media for a time, actually watching less during this time. But when you do watch it, every time, you do it deliberately, using the habits we are working on. Pretty soon, those habits become natural, normal, even automatic.
    - So we're going to encourage you to think about what you can remove from your "diet" in these weeks— something you may fully intend to return to afterward, but you need to step back so you have room to grow.
        - Example: In Lent last year, I realized I was going crazy with web surfing. Too many times, I'd be in the middle of work, and suddenly, thoughtlessly, go check the news. For a season I made a rule for myself that I'd open up the news once a day, read it, then be done until the next day. I don't have that rule permanently and strictly, but it helped me to break off a bad habit and build better ones. A short period had lasting impact.
        - When we think of fasting, we usually think of food. However, more and more, media is being included, because it is something we consume, and we have an appetite for it.
- A Rule of Life also involves positive rules.
    - What are you going to do that is good for you?
    - During this season, perhaps you want to do the same "journalling" work that I am giving you during our gatherings at home when you watch or listen.
    - Also, we'll be talking about certain habits, or spiritual disciplines. Just like we said that what we take in through the media impacts our imaginations and desires, there are things that Christians have always done that do the same. These are the means through which God transforms our mind. I'm going to teach you about some of these habits as the course goes on, but you are likely already familiar with some of them.
    - Habits of Input: Scripture, Stories of the Saints, etc.
    - Habits of Response:
        - Intercession (Noticing and caring about others' pain and trouble)
        - Confession (Receiving and responding to correction)
        - Declaration (Proclaiming the Truth in the face of lies)
        - Meditation (Remembering God's Story)
        - Thanksgiving (Recognizing and Receiving goodness and grace)
    - We need to be specific about these things:
    - What will you do?
    - When will you do it?
    - How often?

- One suggestion: I will choose to exercise one of these habits of response after watching a movie.
- Accountability
  - I'm going to ask you to have at least one person— a parent, a friend, a pastor, a mentor— read and sign your Rule of Life, saying that they know what you are committing to do and will pray for you and ask you about how it is going.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 1 - Introduction and Boundaries - Student Notes

INTRODUCTION

Christians listen or watch with...

- ●_____ :

- ●_____ :

- ●_____ :

- ●_____ :

- ●_____ :

- ●_____ :

- ●_____ :

The media...
- ● Puts us in the middle of a _____.

- ● Exposes us to different _____ and _____.

- ● Shapes our _____ and _____.

- ● Gives us an opportunity to _____ our neighbors.

Two extremes...

- ● Sometimes we act like the media isn't _____ us.

- ● Sometimes we come with a _____ spirit.

Two rules...

James 1:19-

Matthew 22:39-

Three Strategies...

⬤Boundaries: What is _____ for us?

⬤Skills: Things we can _____ when interacting with media.

⬤Habits: Prayerful ways of responding that we can _____.

BOUNDARIES

I need to make boundaries when....

⬤A good thing threatens to _____ my life.

⬤I don't like how something is _____ me.

⬤I'm involved in something that is _____.

⬤I need time and space to build new _____.

A Rule of Life also introduces new things to your life....

⬤Responding thoughtfully through _____.

⬤Habits of _____, such as _____.

⬤Habits of Response:

    1. _____

    2. _____

    3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

● A good rule of life is _____. What? When? How often?

Joining the Conversation

Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

MY MEDIA RULE OF LIFE

I, _____, desiring to build healthy bound-
aries, skills, and habits around my use of the media, am making the following
commitments during the duration of this workshop, from January 25 through
March 22, 2018.

1.) Boundaries Around Media
• To give myself space and time to build new habits, I will limit or regulate my use
  of electronic media in the following ways: (use back if needed)

2.) Habits of Input
• To fill my mind and imagination with the truth and put it into practice, I commit to
  exercise the following habits: (use back if needed)

_____ _____

Signature   Date

I commit to regularly offer support, accountability, and prayer during this course.

_____ _____

Signature   Date

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 2 - Listening to Understand - Teaching Outline

- Introduction
  - Object Lesson: Bring in a piece of my children's workmanship, in this case a "table" created singlehandedly by my seven-year-old, with rough, irregular edges and nails and screws placed in random places.
    - What do you think of this table? (Allow time for critical comments)
    - Offer a bit more information about this table. It was made singlehandedly by my seven-year-old son, and he presented it to me, suggesting that I could use it in my prayer room at home.
    - If he were in the room, how do you think he would react to your evaluation of it? How might you have responded differently?
  - Have you ever written something, acted, performed musically, made art?
    - When you put your work out for others to see, what is that like?
      - Perhaps it is exciting to share something you've carefully prepared.
      - Perhaps you wonder what people will think of your work.
      - Perhaps you are trying to communicate something and wondering if people will get it.
      - Perhaps you've been nervous, wondering how it will be received.
      - Perhaps you've been hurt by criticism
    - We often think of the media as something impersonal and "out there," but imagine how many people have poured themselves into one single movie. How would you want people to receive your work, if you were part of it?
    - Music, television, film, and all media are created by human beings.
    - One great rule that will guide our work today comes from what Jesus called the second greatest of the commandments— Love your neighbor as yourself. How do we do that? Whatever you wish others would do for you, do the same to them.
- What kinds of things might an artist be trying to communicate through a film, a television episode, a song?
  - Perhaps he or she is trying to communicate an experience— joyful, interesting, challenging, or painful. This may be the artist's experience, or that of somebody else for whom the artist is speaking.
  - Perhaps he or she has some idea and is trying to express it.
  - Perhaps the art is designed to get people thinking about something in a new way.
- How can we show honor and respect for the artist and his or her work? (Romans 12:10)
  - We can listen deeply and try to understand what they are saying.
  - We may or may not be able to give our agreement or approval, but we can give our attention

- Note: Often, we get more frustrated, not because people disagree with us, but because it seems like they don't even listen; they've decided what they think beforehand and won't give us the time of day. But how often do we do the same thing, arguing before listening?
- Listening is really quite simple:
  - Pay attention.
  - Ask: What are they talking about?
    - Are they trying to communicate an experience?
    - Is there a big idea being expressed?
    - Are they inviting viewers to think about something particular?
  - Ask: What are they saying about what they are talking about?
    - If they are communicating an experience, try to answer these questions:
      - Whose experience is being shared?
      - Summarize what this person/people are experiencing.
      - What emotions are connected to this experience?
      - What long-term impact has this experience made?
      - How might things have been different?
    - If they are trying to communicate a big idea, try to answer these questions:
      - What is the big idea being shared?
      - What methods are used to communicate this idea?
      - What "case" is being made for this idea?
    - If the artistic work is designed to invite viewers to think about something, try to answer these questions:
      - What questions are being raised by this work?
      - What methods are used to invite viewers to think about these questions?
      - What potential answers to these questions are provided?
      - Is the author leaving the question open-ended, or suggesting an answer?

- As Christians, we are not just called to respect and listen to our neighbors, but to actually love them.
  - If we are saying that those who are speaking through the media, or those on whose behalf they are speaking, are our neighbors, how do we love them?
    - We do not need to generate this love ourselves. The love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
    - However, there are things that we are invited to do, spiritual habits through which God works.
    - I have heard these habits compared to sails. Sails don't make a boat move, the wind does. But the sails prepare the boat to benefit from the wind. Similarly, nothing we do will make us people who love our neighbors, but there are some things we can do that will prepare us for God to produce his love in us.
    - When Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, he didn't just tell us to feel an emotion. He gave us something we can do: do good for them and pray for them. When we do these things, we put ourself in a position for God's love to grow in us.

- Example: I'm just got out of an active disagreement with somebody who is building a house next to my home. It dragged out over months. Tempted to see him as an enemy, I have decided to pray for him and the workers he has hired, asking God to bless them with wisdom and safety, etc. And prayer changes my heart.
- Once we have listened and sought to really understand somebody, we have had a glimpse of their heart. How do you respond to that? There are all sorts of possiblities, but there is one way that you can begin to respond in a thoroughly Christian way, immediately, every time. That is through the habit of Intercession, which means to pray on somebody else's behalf.
- Practicing the Habit of Intercession
  - You can always simply pray for somebody, without a plan or a guide. But sometimes, particularly as we are working on a new habit, we need some help. Sometimes we just don't know how to do it, but we also want to make sure that we aren't just praying according to our will, but according to God's will.
  - Here is a potential process:
    - First, having listened, ask these questions:
      - Who can I pray for as a response to what I have seen and heard?
      - What blessing does this person/people truly need from God? (this could be different from what they might want, though it is probably connected in some way)
    - Second, decide how to pray. Write it down if it helps. In the Book of Common Prayer, many good prayers are structured this way:
      - Address to God: God has lots of names; perhaps one name is particularly relevant to what you are asking about?
        - "Almighty God…"
      - Something true about God: What has God revealed about himself in Scripture that makes you confident to ask him for this blessing?
        - "…to whom we must account for all our powers and privileges…"
      - What you are asking for: State particularly what blessing you are asking God to give.
        - "…Guide the people of the United States in the election of officials and representatives…"
      - What result you envision resulting when God answers this prayer:
        - "…that, by faithful administration and wise laws, the rights of all may be protected and our nation be enabled to fulfill your purposes…"
      - We conclude in Jesus' Name:
        - "…through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."
- This kind of prayer comes not from how we feel about somebody, but is deliberate, seeking to discern from God's Word what he would have us to ask. This is a powerful kind of prayer.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 2 - Listening to Understand / Intercession - Student Notes

LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND

All media is created by _____.

Romans 12:10: "Love one another with brother affection.
Outdo one another in showing _____."

What may an artist be trying to communicate through his or her work?

⬤ Communicate an _____ — theirs or someone
  else's

⬤ Share an _____.

⬤ Invite others to _____ about something.

We show honor and respect for an artist when we _____ and seek to

_____.

We can not always give _____ or _____, but
we can

give _____.

Listening questions:

⬤ What are they _____ about?

⬤ What are they trying to _____ about it?

INTERCESSION

⬤ We are called not just to _____ or

_____ our

neighbors, but to _____ them.

⬤ Love is _____ to us by God.

⬤ Spiritual Habits are like _____ that open us up to the work of
the Spirit.

⬤ The habit Jesus offers to help us learn to love others is

_____.

This process may help us to learn to intercede:

⬤ _____ can I pray for in response to what I have seen or heard?

⬤ What _____ does this person/people need from God?

⬤ _____

One traditional structure for intercession (among many)

⬤ Address the prayer to _____.

⬤ Stating something _____ about God that gives you
confidence in asking.

⬤ Make your _____.

⬤ State the _____ you are hoping for.

⬤ Conclude your prayer in _____ name.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 2 - Listening to Understand- Skill Practice

Ask the following questions about the media selection to which you are listening:

<u>What are they talking about?</u> Circle any of these that seem to apply.
          The author is trying to share a life experience.
          There is a message or big idea being expressed.
          Viewers / Hearers are being invited to think about something.

<u>What are they saying about what they are talking about?</u>

If the author is trying to share a life experience, answer these questions:

          Whose experience is being shared?

          Summarize what this person/people are experiencing.

          What emotions are connected to this experience?

          What long-term impact has this experience made?

          How might things have been different?

If a message or big idea is being expressed, answer these questions:

What is the big idea being shared?

What methods are used to communicate this idea?

What "case" is being made for this idea?

If viewers or hearers are being invited to think about something, answer these questions:

What questions are being raised by this work?

What methods are used to invite viewers to think about these questions?

What potential answers to these questions are provided?

Is the author leaving the question open-ended, or suggesting an answer?

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 2 - Habit Practice- Intercession

After carefully listening to a selection of media, try to answer these questions:

Who can I pray for as a response to what I have seen and heard?

What blessing does this person/people truly need from God?

Based on the answers above, compose a prayer, following this form.

Address to God (To Whom are you praying?):

Say something true about God (Why are you bold to pray for this?)

State a request (For what are you praying?)

State what you hope to happen after God answers this prayer (To what end are you praying?)

Pray in Jesus Name (Through whom are you praying?)

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 3 - Receiving a Correction / Confession - Teaching Outline

- Introduction: When was a time when you were truly convicted, when you knew that something you were doing, were about to do, or a way you were thinking was simply wrong and needed to change?
  - Example: I attended a public high school, and I was that Christian student who was pretty sure that he had it figured out and tended communicate that to others whether I wanted to or not. One student, who was clearly and outspokenly not living a Christian lifestyle, confronted me about it on the bus one day. He was completely correct, and I knew it immediately. But I did not expect to hear a correction from him.
- Correction in Scripture- God can correct us through many different methods.
  - Nathan and David- David has hardened himself, but Nathan sneaks in with a good story and only turns it around on him at the end.
  - Balaam's Donkey- God chose to "restrain the prophet's madness" through a wild animal
  - Good Samaritan- Moral of the story is obvious but uncomfortable through and through.
  - The Lying Prophet- Can a true message come through a lying messenger?
  - Ezekiel- Street Theater
  - Amos- An outsider
  - The Holy Spirit can convict us at any time and in any way.
    - The Holy Scriptures are profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. They are thoroughly trustworthy.
    - But there are voices all around us that can be used to correct us.
- The role of the media in correction.
  - Art has a powerful way of getting through our defenses and impacting us at a different level from mere words.
  - Art can present ordinary life in a special way, helping us to see things we would otherwise miss.
  - Today's social media give a chance for people to respond to today's situations very quickly, and allow everybody to have at least some voice.
- Barriers to receiving and responding to correction in a healthy way:
  - The *ad hominem*. We have drawn a sharp line between "us" and "them" and we put ourselves in the place of the critic. Because of this, we won't listen with humility.
    - Example: How hard is it for somebody critical of President Trump to say, "The President is right" even when he obviously is? Once you've decided what you think of somebody, it is very hard to listen to them about anything!

- Indignation. Perhaps we are not in a position of critiquing the media, and we find we agree with what is being said. Sometimes we are willing to be indignant about an evil being done "out there" but have never turned the light on ourselves.
  - Example: How many people have been indignant about police brutality toward African Americans, used #BlackLivesMatter, but not stopped to think about their own attitudes?
- Distraction. If an artistic piece is designed to convict us deeply and we are multitasking or otherwise distracted, it is likely not to have the desired impact.
- Mindlessness. Whether through bad mental habits or exhaustion, we often simply miss the point.
- "Wholesaling." Sometimes, particularly when something corrective is coming from a source that is hostile to Christians, there are elements of what is being said that are true and should be convicting, and there are elements that are not. We make a mistake if we either (a) ignore the true elements, or (b) receive the true corrections and therefore assume that everything being said has the same level of moral authority.
- Questions worth asking:
  - Did I feel challenged or otherwise morally uncomfortable when watching this?
  - What behaviors were being challenged in this selection? What attitudes or beliefs?
  - Are these challenges true? Are they Biblical?
  - Is anything I have been doing/believing/thinking/feeling personally being corrected here?
  - Is something being corrected that I participate in indirectly by being part of a nation, a group, the Church?
  - Is there any aspect of critique that I shouldn't take to heart?
- Habit of Response: Confession.
  - Ultimately, if you are being truly convicted of sin, that is the domain of the Holy Spirit.
  - When you walk away from this experience, in what ways do you feel conviction?
  - Is the thing you are convicted of really a sin? What Scriptural principles help you to know this?
  - Is there a personal sin in thought, word, or deed, that you realize you have committed?
  - Is there a corporate or group sin that you have been part of?
  - What does repentance look like in this situation?— Repentance is not just stopping, but doing the opposite.
  - What does restitution look like in this situation? —Restitution is making it right, as much as is in our power. Sometimes it is not in our power.
  - We confess sins to God, to his people, and to those who we have sinned against.
  - Pray prayer of Confession together as a group.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 3 - Receiving a Correction / Confession - Student Notes

RECEIVING A CORRECTION

The media can effectively deliver a correction to individuals or society, because...

⬤Art gets through our _____ in a unique way.

⬤Art helps us to see things that we don't normally _____.

⬤Social media can respond to things _____ and give everyone a small

_____.

Boundaries to effectively receiving a correction:

⬤The ad hominem: _____ what you hear because of who said it.

⬤Indignation: We focus on the sins of _____.

⬤_____: Multitasking keeps us from receiving art as it is intended.

⬤_____: When no mental effort is given, we often miss the point.

⬤"Wholesaling": Assuming that the speaker must be completely

_____ or completely _____.

CONFESSION OF SIN

Conviction of sin is the work of the _____.

John 16:8: And when the Holy Spirit comes, he will _____ the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

Once you have been convicted, it is between you and _____.

Feeling guilty and being truly convicted are not always the _____ thing.

Questions worth asking:

● Is this really a _____? Look to the Scriptures.

● Is this a sin of _____, _____, or _____?

● Is this sin _____ or _____?

Repentance means more than _____.

Restitution means doing what is in your power to make it _____.

We confess our sins to:

God, seeking _____.

One another, seeking _____.

The person we offended, seeking _____ and _____.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 3 - Receiving a Correction - Skill Practice

After watching today's selection, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What behaviors, attitudes, or beliefs were being challenged?

2. What methods were used to help this challenging content reach the audience?

3. Were these challenges based on the truth? Are they Biblical?

4. Is this critiquing something that I have been doing or believing or thinking?

5. Is this critique poking at any sort of corporate sin of a larger group, like the nation, the Church, a particular group of people? Am I part of that group?

6. Is there any aspect of this critique that I shouldn't take to heart? Why?

Joining the Conversation
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Session 3 - Confession - Habit Practice

Are you feeling convicted about something after watching and discussing this selection?

What actual sin are we dealing with here?

Is this a sin that you have done personally, or a corporate sin that you've participated in?

Who do you need to confess this sin to?

What does repentance and restitution look like in this situation?

Pray to God. You may include in this prayer....

I.   What sin you've committed.
II. Asking for forgiveness.
III. Asking for the grace to live righteously going forward.
IV. Asking for restoration of any relationships that have been damaged.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 4 - Seeing the Hidden Narrative / Meditation - Teaching Outline

- Introduction: Have a conversation with a student you know better, and have the group try to use as many context clues to figure out the backstory (ie. making plans for the youth retreat tomorrow)
- We've said that culture is like one big conversation, and that every song, every film, every tweet represents a part of that conversation. Some parts of deeply meaningful, some are not. But part of the skill of understanding is realizing that there are a lot of things that are assumed, but not said.
- This could be called a "hidden narrative"— the story behind the story. Or it could be called a "worldview," the assumptions with which one looks at the world.
- Reasons we need to learn to see the hidden narrative
  - It is hard to understand what is being said without understanding the back story.
    - Example: In the world of Star Wars, there is an objective good and evil… at least in the original ones. That is actually a worldview assumption— without it, the story makes no sense.
  - Sometimes the things that are unstated, but that we can hear, tell us more than what is said.
  - Sometimes we can separate the message of a work from its underlying assumptions.
    - We may disagree with many of the assumptions but agree with the message, or the reverse.
      - *This is Us*[3]- A character needs to overcome her fears and hangups that are isolating her. So she finally takes a major step and stops pushing away somebody who truly cares for her. You say, "That's great." The next scene, they're in bed together. There is a backstory there that says this is normal— if you get in a relationship with somebody, you sleep with them. That's not the point; its' just how they see the world.
  - Sometimes those underlying assumptions affect us; because they are unstated, they get into our minds without our realizing it.
    - It is hard to enjoy a Kung Fu movie without accepting that, sometimes, it is right to take matters into your own hands and use violent force. Imagine the internal dissonance of being a pacifist and enjoying this film, or one that valorizes military service and sacrifice.
- The best way to understand one of these narratives is to ask big questions.
  - When you ask, particularly on something shorter, you may not get answers to all of them.

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[3] This is Us. "Kyle." Season 1, Episode 3. Directed by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa. Written by Dan Fogelman. NBC, October 10, 2016.

- Be willing to mess up here. You might not get it perfectly, but it is worth trying.
- Pay attention to:
  - For what is said to be true, what else must be true?
  - Communication can be through the tone rather than just the words
- Questions we will ask of the work will get into the big picture— for this selection of media to speak truly, what must be true about the world, about humanity, about God, about good and evil, about truth, etc.
- Once you have recognized these hidden assumptions, you are able to:
  - evaluate them in themselves
  - evaluate the value of the art in spite of them.
  - figure out what the person is actually saying.

- Meditation
  - The practice of prayer that I want to introduce today is meditation.
  - We usually don't think of Christian meditation when we hear this word; it is often thought of as clearing your mind.
  - Christian meditation is more like a cow chewing the cud— keep bringing it up and chewing until you get the last bit out of it… or like chewing bubble gum until there is no flavor left.
  - When we realize that we've been soaking in a set of assumptions and a backstory that may not be completely in line with the Christian story, meditation is a wonderful gift. We intentionally soak ourselves in the Word of God.
  - The art of *lectio divina*
    - Choose a Scriptural passage. In this case, choose it in light of what the unstated assumptions you have been interacting with may be. Make it short.
    - Get quiet and still.
    - *Lectio*: Read it slowly and attentively. If something jumps out at you, stop to dwell on it.
    - *Meditatio*: Read and think deeply on that line. Don't fill your mind with your own words, but with these words. Let them sink into your imagination.
    - *Oratio*: Respond to God. What do you have to say to him?
    - *Contemplatio*: When you get quiet, go with it; simply be in love and awe of God.

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Session 4 - Seeing the Hidden Narrative / Meditation - Student Notes

The unstated set of assumptions, or "back story", behind anything that is said or created, can be referred to as a _____, or a
_____.

Benefits of seeing the hidden narrative:

⬤Knowing the back story helps us better to _____ what is being said.

⬤We are able to _____ the message from the hidden assumptions.

⬤We may see how these assumptions are _____ us.

We best understand the hidden narrative by _____.

⬤Some of these questions will go _____ in any work.

⬤We need to seek answers in what is said and _____ it is said.

⬤This is an imprecise work and we might be _____.

Meditation gives us a chance to feed our _____ with God's Word.

The process of Lectio Divina:

⬤_____ a Scripture text.

⬤Get _____ and _____.

⬤Read _____ and _____.

⬤Choose key words and _____, letting them sink in.

⬤_____ to God.

⬤Stop and _____.

Joining the Conversation
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Session 4 - Seeing the Hidden Narrative- Skill Practice[4]

Preliminary Questions:

1. Who is the protagonist in this song? The antagonist?
2. What is the conflict? It there a conflict with herself? With someone else?
3. Is there a story being told here? What is it?
4. How does the conflict resolve itself— is something learned or accomplished?

Worldview Questions:
1. What does it assume about God?
2. What does it assume about people?
3. What does it assume about human society and relationships?
4. What moral or ethical code is being assumed?
5. What is the greatest evil pictured in this work?
6. What is the highest good pictured in this work?
7. How does this story measure or define "the good life"?

Response Questions:
1. Which of these assumptions should we affirm?
2. Which of these assumptions should we reject?
3. Which of these assumptions are questionable?

This content is drawn heavily from a longer list of questions laid out in the *Worldview Detective* curriculum. Andrews, 8-11.

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Session 4 - Meditation - Habit Practice

1. Is there an assumption in this selection (discerned in Skill Practice), which you either affirm or reject, that you'd like to dwell on further?
2. What Scripture text might help you to do that?
3. Get quiet and comfortable... not too comfortable.
4. Read the text slowly and attentively.
5. If a particular line gets your attention, repeat it to yourself. Let it sink in. Wonder about it. Allow it to paint a picture in your mind.
6. Respond in prayer to what you have heard— perhaps your prayer is of thanksgiving, or confession, or petition, or praise, or something completely different.
7. If you find yourself running out of words, simply be still.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 5 - Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent / Declaration - Teaching Outline

- Introduction: Most people think that, if we teach people to recognize the nature of advertisements— that they are designed to convince you to pay for a good or a service, by somebody who wants to profit from it— that this will decrease their effects. It turns out very often not to be true.
- Advertising (particularly modern advertising) targets our imaginations. Our mind is flooded with images and very short stories that shape our definition of what is good, attractive, desirable.
- Most of the work happens at the level of the subconscious. It turns out to often be more effective when we are ignoring it. We're checking our texts, talking to our families, working on our homework, and the ads are running in the background, filling our minds with images and stories.
- Advertisement is somewhat like evangelism. Though it might not be spelled out, there is often some sort of "good news" being proclaimed.
- Traditionally, this might be spelled out-
  - The ideal of blessedness: For a man to have women flocking to him.
  - The problem: He stinks, and nobody wants to be near him
  - The good news: Introducing our deodorant…
  - The final state of blessedness: Now he has women flocking to him.
- Often, it is less spelled out (ie. Axe ad with women lined up at confessional)
  - The ideal of blessedness: You are so magnetically attractive that women are unable to control themselves around you.
  - The problem: You're not. At all.
  - The good news: The Axe Effect
  - The final state of blessedness: You have women falling all over you, evidenced in the ad by a line of women lined up to confess their sins.
- This isn't just selling a product, but a way of looking at the world. Rather than logically convincing you that their deodorant is superior, Axe (a) fills your mind with images of women who are falling all over men, and (b) associates their brand with those images. The job is done. We are trained to be consumers, because our imaginations have told us (a) what the good life is, and (b) that we can achieve that good life if we buy the right thing.
- Creating an alternate salvation narrative does more than sell products. The "good news" approach has greater, more devastating fruit. The Axe ad, for instance…
  - Provides a distorted view of sexuality— the good life is to have this highly animal drive satisfied, and this is far more "real" and exciting than following traditional morality. Marriage is completely out of view here.

- Devalues women, turning them into sexual objects to be collected (the more the better)
- Gives us an opportunity to deceive ourselves— if we buy the product, we look at ourselves "more highly than we ought"— and we let ourselves be deceived because we want what is being sold.
- Gives us a lower and cheaper answer to "Blessed are the…"
- It isn't enough to recognize that Axe is making an unsupported claim— "Our deodorant actually makes you smell irresistibly attractive." We need to question the stories that we are being asked to believe and the images we are bringing into our mind.

Declaration
- Last gathering, we focused on the work of meditation, when we talked about the hidden narratives that are behind so many products of the media. We said that meditating on the Word of God gives our imaginations an opportunity to be fed with what is good and true. This work is incredibly important.
- An additional discipline is one of taking what is under the surface and making it explicit.
- Renunciation is the work of rejecting a belief, attitude, action, or entity that is controlling you.
- Declaration is the work of speaking the truth as revealed by God, declaring it to be true.
- The Creed is probably the most famous example of Declaration.
- Renunciation and Declaration make things explicit.
- Words have power (Isa 55:10-11)- so when we speak the truth in Jesus' name, or when we renounce lies in Jesus' Name, those words do something. It has the power to cut through lies and take their power away.

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Session 5 - Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent / Declaration - Student Notes

RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO PERSUASIVE INTENT

Advertisement is still effective when people _____ the intention to profit.

Advertisement targets our _____ and works on a _____ level.

Advertisement can be more effective when we are _____ it.

An effective advertisement is similar to _____.

⬤The _____ of "blessedness"

⬤The "Fall"— holding you back from blessedness

⬤The Good News— The _____ solves the problem.

⬤The final state of "blessedness"

Advertisements train us to be _____.

Our work is not only to question the claims being made in an advertisement, but also the _____ and _____ that we receive.

DECLARATION AND RENUNCIATION

_____ is explicitly naming and rejecting beliefs, attitudes, or powers that control you.

_____ is speaking forth the truth as revealed in God's Word, contradicting the lie.

Isaiah 55:10-11- Words have _____.

Joining the Conversation
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Session 5 -Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent - Skill Practice

I- The Ideal of "Blessedness"
If you had nothing but this advertisement to work with, how would you fill in the blank:
"Blessed are those who_____."

II- The "Fall"
According to this advertisement (either explicitly or implied), why are people not experiencing this "blessedness"?

III- The Good News
What is being offered to address the problem and bring the "blessed" state about?

IV- The Final State of "Blessedness"
What results are we led to expect if we take the path of salvation being offered?

V- The Implications
If you receive this "good news," how might it impact the way you think, act, or interact with others?

Joining the Conversation

Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 5 - Renunciation and Declaration - Habit Practice

Is there something in the content of this advertisement, working its way into your imagination, that is harmful to you or runs against the Word of God? In its description of the good life? In the solution it offers to our problems? In the "story" it is asking you to believe? Define that lie in clear words.

In the name of Jesus Christ, I renounce _____.

In response to that which you renounced, what truth can you declare from God's Word?

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 6 - Finding Common Ground / Thanksgiving - Teaching Outline

- Introduction: Perhaps you realize that the skills and habits we're practicing work not just with the media, but really anytime we are interacting with somebody who is different from us. We're practicing them here in a safe setting, but we can apply them anywhere.
  - We practice listening— paying attention and asking questions to understand where somebody is coming from.
  - We practice taking a correction— whether we agree with somebody or not, we try to notice if they are calling attention to something we are doing or thinking that is wrong.
  - We pay attention and try to understand the hidden narratives, the unspoken assumptions that are making somebody speak and act in the way they are.
  - We try to be savvy to the ways in which people are trying to persuade us to begin thinking and seeing the world in a different way. It is part of being loving, humble, and wise.
  - Today's subject is, to me the most exciting. Today we practice finding common ground— recognizing something that lines up, at least partially, with a Christian perspective, and recognizing how the truth of God's Word can add something positive to the conversation.
- Common Grace
  - Mt 5:45- "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."— God gives many good gifts to all people.
  - Genesis 1:27- So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.— Each person continues to carry the image of God, even though affected by sin.
  - Romans 1:19-10- For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. — There are things about God that are plain to see.
  - Acts 17:27-28- "…that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. for "'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.'" — Even if feeling around in the dark, you're going to get something right.
- Special Revelation
  - Clearly there are many things that we would not know unless they were revealed to us by God's Word, particularly the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

- In the last verse above, Paul had become familiar with the perspective of the people around him, had learned some of their own poetry, and started the conversation from a point of agreement. Then he *added* a new contribution, not from his own genius (groping around in the dark with them), but from God's Special Revelation.
- Example: Horton Hears a Who[5]- "A person's a person, no matter how small."
  - That oft-repeated phrase is the heart of the book, and in complete agreement with a Christian perspective.
  - What do we have to add to the conversation as Christians?
    - First, we can contribute a reason. Yes, we too believe that every life should be protected, no matter how apparently insignificant *because* we believe each person is created in God's image, and because God himself has revealed himself to be the defender of the weak.
    - Second, Christians have pointed out that this perspective leads very naturally to a pro-life perspective, highlighting that the person who is tiny and unseen is actually a person worthy of protection, if only we could see it. Here, we're calling on those who agree that "a person's a person…" to be consistent with their own perspective.
  - Seuss's widow has resisted this interpretation, saying that there is no political statement intended. But are his words being twisted? Or are his words being appreciated and drawn to their logical conclusion?
- Conversations from Common Ground don't mean that we need to agree about everything. They mean that we have some common points of agreement from which we can have a good conversation—
  - We may be building on that agreement, adding a unique perspective from God's Word.
  - We may be providing a new worldview perspective that puts that perspective on firmer ground— giving a better reason (What's so special about personhood?)
  - We may be starting from that common point in an apologetic way, arguing that this shared perspective undermines other parts of somebody's perspective, arguing that Scripture provides us with a more coherent way forward.
  - We may simply be removing barriers— removing negative stereotypes of Christians by showing what we do share with our neighbors' perspectives.
- Points of caution: we don't like to agree *and* disagree with somebody, but it important to recognize where the points of agreement stop— this is where there is an opportunity for the gospel to make a difference in the conversation. Sometimes we will want to affirm a perspective completely, but sometimes we will want to affirm it partially, but take it in a different direction.

Thanksgiving
- This could be the easiest habit we've been focused on yet.
- We recognize that truth and goodness, wherever we find it, is from God.
- Instead of being troubled when we hear people with no faith in God

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[5] Dr. Seuss. *Horton Hears a Who*. (New York: Random House, 1954).

- We can give thanks for whatever goodness or truth we see through any selection of media we encounter.
- We can also give thanks for the ways in which our encounter with that media leads us to approach God's Word in new ways, and for what we discover in the process.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 6 - Finding Common Ground / Thanksgiving - Student Notes

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Common Grace means that you don't have to be a Christian to have
_____ or _____ in your life.

Special Revelation is that which we only know through
_____.

Once we find a point of _____, we can
_____ to the conversation in several ways:

⬤ Provide a better _____ for believing what we do.

⬤ Build on the agreement, adding a unique _____.

⬤ Point out _____, offering a more coherent way forward.

⬤ Remove _____ by destroying negative stereotypes.

We may affirm a perspective _____ or _____.

THANKSGIVING

Wherever we find it, truth and goodness come from _____.

We thank God whenever we _____ truth and beauty.

We thank God when we _____ or _____
something from his Word.

Joining the Conversation
Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Session 6 - Finding Common Ground / Thanksgiving - Skill and Habit Practice

What did you see in this selection that a Christian ought to affirm? Should we affirm it fully or partially?

From a Biblical perspective, why should this be affirmed?

How might a biblical perspective add something new to the "conversation"?

How might a biblical perspective lead somebody who shares the view being affirmed to hold it more consistently?

What barriers to communication might be broken down if people realized the common ground that exists here?

What truth or goodness have you seen here for which you wish to give thanks? What biblical truth have you seen more clearly?

Joining the Conversation

Boundaries, Skills, and Habits for Media Use

Weekly Journaling Assignment

After viewing or listening to the week's selection(s), please take 30 minutes to thoughtfully respond to each of these questions:

1.) Choose a character (or the creator of the piece) and tell about their personal experience. Did this selection show you something about their background, their joys or pains, their dreams and fears, the difficulties they face, etc.? What in particular helped you to understand more clearly?

2.) What did you find challenging or convicting? How might you respond?

3.) What unstated assumptions were behind this work? Was there a "story behind the story"?

4.) Was this work trying to persuade you to believe anything in particular to look at things in a new way? If so, what? How might you respond?

5.) What did you find in this work that you can affirm from a Biblical perspective? How might you build on this common ground to share an insight from the Scriptures?

APPENDIX 2

RAW DATA - SKILL EVALUATION

This appendix contains raw evaluative data, organized by skill as follows:

2A- Listening to Understand

2B- Receiving a Correction

2C- Detecting Hidden Narratives

2D- Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent

2E- Finding Common Ground

Data is organized by session, type, and analyst. The first number indicates the session in which the data was collected. The letter indicates whether data was drawn from journalling assignments (J) or transcripts of group discussions (T). The third letter indicates which of the three analysts assigned this grade. So, column 1J3 shows the numerical grade (from 1-5) given for data from first session which data was collection, drawn from the journalling assignment, as graded by the third evaluator.

Appendix 2A

Listening to Understand

Parti-cipant	4 T 1	4 T 2	4 T 3	5J 1	5J 2	5J 3	5 T 1	5 T 2	5 T 3	6J 1	6J 2	6J 3	6 T 1	6 T 2	6 T 3	7J 1	7J 2	7J 3	7 T 1	7 T 2	7 T 3
A	3	3	3	5	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3
B	3	3	3	1	3	4				4	4	4				3	3	2	4	4	4
C	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	3	3	3		5	5	4	5	5
D	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	2	3	2	3	3	2
E	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	2	3	3	3
F	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4
G				3	3	3													3	3	3
H	4	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	1	3	3	3	3	3
I				4	3	4	4	3	3							4	4	3	2	4	3
J	2	3	3							3	4	3	3	3	3	2	4	3	3	4	4
K	3	3	3	4	3	4										3	3	3	3	3	3
L				4	5	5				4	4	4				3	4	4			

Parti-cipant	4T1	4T2	4T3	5J1	5J2	5J3	5T1	5T2	5T3	6J1	6J2	6J3	6T1	6T2	6T3	7J1	7J2	7J3	7T1	7T2	7T3
A	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4
B	4	3	4	3	4	3				3	4	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
C	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3		4	3	3	3	3
D	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	1	3	3	3	3
E	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
F	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
G				3	3	3													3	3	3
H	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
I				3	4	3	3	3	3							3	3	3	3	3	3
J	3	3	3							3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
K	3	3	3	4	4	4										3	3	3	3	3	3
L				4	5	3				3	4	3				3	3		3	3	3

Appendix 2B

Receiving a Correction

Participant	1J1	1J2	1J3	1T1	1T2	1T3	2J1	2J2	2J3	2T1	2T2	2T3	3J1	3J2	3J3	3T1	3T2	3T3	4J1	4J2	4J3
A							4	4	3				4	3	3				3	3	3
B	3	3	3	3	3	3													3	3	3
C	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
D	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
E	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
F	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
G				3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3						
H				3	3	3				3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3
I							4	5	3							3	3	3			
J	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
K	3	3	3	3	3	3															
L							5	5	5				3	4	4	3	3	3			

Parti-cipant	4T1	4T2	4T3	5J1	5J2	5J3	5T1	5T2	5T3	6J1	6J2	6J3	6T1	6T2	6T3	7J1	7J2	7J3	7T1	7T2	7T3
A	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4
B	4	3	4	3	4	3				3	4	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
C	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3		4	3	3	3	3
D	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	1	3	3	3	3
E	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
F	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
G				3	3	3													3	3	3
H	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
I				3	4	3	3	3	3							3	3	3	3	3	3
J	3	3	3							3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
K	3	3	3	4	4	4										3	3	3	3	3	3
L				4	5	3				3	4	3				3	3		3	3	3

Appendix 2C

Detecting Hidden Narratives

Participant	1J1	1J2	1J3	1T1	1T2	1T3	2J1	2J2	2J3	2T1	2T2	2T3	3J1	3J2	3J3	3T1	3T2	3T3	4J1	4J2	4J3
A							3	3	3				3	3	5				4	4	5
B	3	3	3	3	3	3													3	4	3
C	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	3	4	5
D	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	4
E	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
F	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3				4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
G				4	4	3	3	3	3				3	3	3						
H				3	2	2				3	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	5	3	3	3
I							3	4	4							3	3	3			
J	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
K	3	3	3	3	3	3															
L							4	4	4				3	4	5	3	3	3			

Parti-cipant	4T1	4T2	4T3	5J1	5J2	5J3	5T1	5T2	5T3	6J1	6J2	6J3	6T1	6T2	6T3	7J1	7J2	7J3	7T1	7T2	7T3
A	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	3
B	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	4	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
C	3	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3		3	5	3	4	3
D	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	1	1	3	3
E	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
F	3	4	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	2	3	3	3
G				3	3	3													3	3	3
H	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	3
I				3	3	3	3	3	3							3	3	4	3	3	3
J	3	3	2							3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
K	3	3	3	3	3	3										3	3	3	3	3	3
L				3	4	3				3	4	3				3	2	2			

Appendix 2D

Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent

Parti-cipant	1J1	1J2	1J3	1T1	1T2	1T3	2J1	2J2	2J3	2T1	2T2	2T3	3J1	3J2	3J3	3T1	3T2	3T3	4J1	4J2	4J3
A							3	4	3				4	3	3				4	3	5
B	3	4	3	3	3	3													3	3	3
C	3	5	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	4
D	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	4	3
E	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
F	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3				5	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
G				3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3						
H				3	3	3				3	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	3	2	3	3
I							3	3	3							3	3	3			
J	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
K	3	3	3	3	3	3															
L							4	5	3				4	4	3	3	3	3			

Parti-cipant	4T1	4T2	4T3	5J1	5J2	5J3	5T1	5T2	5T3	6J1	6J2	6J3	6T1	6T2	6T3	7J1	7J2	7J3	7T1	7T2	7T3
A	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3
B	3	3	3	3	3	3				4	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
C	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3		4	3	4	4	3
D	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	2	4	3
E	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
F	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
G				3	3	3													3	3	3
H	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3
I				3	4	3	3	3	3							3	3	3	3	4	3
J	3	3	3							3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	5	3	3	3
K	3	3	3	3	3	3										3	3	3	3	3	3
L				3	4	3				4	4	3				2	3	3			

Finding Common Ground

Parti-cipant	1J1	1J2	1J3	1T1	1T2	1T3	2J1	2J2	2J3	2T1	2T2	2T3	3J1	3J2	3J3	3T1	3T2	3T3	4J1	4J2	4J3
A							4	3	3				5	3	4				3	4	2
B	4	4	4	4	4	3													3	3	3
C	3	4	3	4	4	3	5	5	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
D	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
E	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3				4	3	3	3	3	3
F	5	5	2	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	3
G				3	3	3	2	3	3				3	3	3						
H				3	3	3				3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
I							3	3	3							3	3	3			
J	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3				3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
K	3	3	3	3	3	3															
L							5	4	4				5	4	4	3	3	3			

Parti-cipant	4 T 1	4 T 2	4 T 3	5J 1	5J 2	5J 3	5 T 1	5 T 2	5 T 3	6J 1	6J 2	6J 3	6 T 1	6 T 2	6 T 3	7J 1	7J 2	7J 3	7 T 1	7 T 2	7 T 3
A	4	3	3	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3
B	4	3	3	4	3	4				3	4	3				3	3	3	3	3	3
C	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	3	4	3		3	4	4	4	4
D	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
E	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	3
F	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
G				3	3	3													3	3	3
H	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	5	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
I				3	3	3	3	4	3							3	3	3	3	3	3
J	3	3	3							3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3
K	3	3	3	4	3	3										4	3	3	4	3	3
L				4	4	4				3	4	3				3	2	2			

APPENDIX 3

SUMMARY OF RAW DATA BY GRADE

These tables summarize the raw data points in Appendix 2. For each skill, a table shows how many points of data correspond to each grade, for each of the seven sessions in which data was collected. Each column is for a data collecting session; each row is for a numerical grade. This chart combines data from journalling assignments and discussion transcripts.

Listening to Understand							
Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2	3	1	1	3	1	0	5
3	22	26	25	36	33	26	34
4	20	8	14	11	16	19	18
5	2	4	3	1	3	3	4

Receiving a Correction							
Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
3	47	30	41	48	43	45	63
4	0	5	3	3	9	3	3
5	0	4	0	0	1	0	0

Detecting Hidden Narratives							
Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
2	2	1	1	1	0	0	5
3	37	31	36	37	50	39	54
4	8	7	4	10	5	9	2
5	0	0	4	3	0	0	2

Recognizing and Responding to Persuasive Intent							
Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
2	1	1	0	1	0	1	4
3	42	30	35	34	46	43	50
4	4	7	8	15	8	4	7
5	1	1	2	1	0	0	1

Finding Common Ground							
Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	1	1	0	1	0	0	2
3	33	28	31	44	32	40	52
4	12	7	12	6	18	8	11
5	2	3	2	0	4	0	0

APPENDIX 4

SKILL MANIFESTATION PERCENTAGES (COMBINED)

This table shows the percentage of participants in each session who showed significant manifestation of each skill. Significant manifestation is counted when two of three analysts assign a student with a 4 or 5 in a particular skill. This table shows the perc entages of students who showed significant manifestation of skills in their journalling and/or discussion transcript data. Skills are organized in rows, sessions of data collection are organized in columns.Percentages are in bold type when the skill being measured was emphasized during that particular session.

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Listening to Understand	**88.9**	30	40	33.3	45.5	77.8	**58.3**
Receiving a Correction	0	**30**	10	11.1	27.3	0	0
Detecting Hidden Narratives	22.2	20	**20**	44.4	9	11.1	0
Recognizing Attempts to Persuade	11.1	20	30	**55.6**	18.2	11.1	16.7
Finding Common Ground	44.4	20	40	11.1	**45.5**	**0**	8.3

APPENDIX 5

SKILL MANIFESTATION PERCENTAGES (JOURNAL ONLY)

This table shows the percentage of participants in each session who showed significant manifestation of each skill. Significant manifestation is counted when two of three analysts assign a student with a 4 or 5 in a particular skill. This table shows the percentages of students who showed significant manifestation of skills in their journalling data. Skills are organized in rows, sessions of data collection are organized in columns.Percentages are in bold type when the skill being measured was emphasized during that particular session.

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Listening to Understand	**85.7**	33.3	57.1	37.5	45.5	55.6	**36.4**
Receiving a Correction	0	**33.3**	14.3	0	27.3	0	0
Detecting Hidden Narratives	0	22.2	**28.6**	25	9	0	0
Recognizing Attempts to Persuade	0	22.2	42.9	**25**	9	11.1	9
Finding Common Ground	28.6	33.3	42.6	0	**36.4**	**0**	0

APPENDIX 6

SKILL MANIFESTATION PERCENTAGES (TRANSCRIPT ONLY)

This table shows the percentage of participants in each session who showed significant manifestation of each skill. Significant manifestation is counted when two of three analysts assign a student with a 4 or 5 in a particular skill. This table shows the percentages of students who showed significant manifestation of skills in transcripts of class discussions. Skills are organized in rows, sessions of data collection are organized in columns. Percentages are in bold type when the skill being measured was emphasized during that particular session.

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Listening to Understand	**33.3**	0	25	0	0	28.6	**45.5**
Receiving a Correction	0	**0**	0	11.1	0	0	0
Detecting Hidden Narratives	22.2	0	**0**	22.2	0	14.3	0
Recognizing Attempts to Persuade	11.1	25	0	**44.4**	14.3	14.3	9
Finding Common Ground	33.3	25	25	11.1	**42.9**	**0**	9

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